

FATHER  
DE SMET



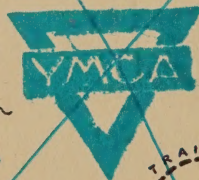
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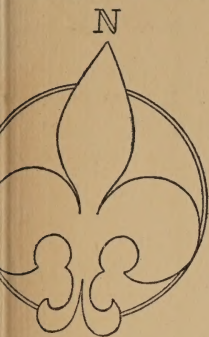
MONTEREY

MAP of  
the NORTH WEST  
Rivers and Trails

Dotted Lines — Denote Routes Traveled

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*E. Theodore Bachman*

S H P O S S E S S I O N S









FATHER DE SMET

*Pioneer Priest of the Rockies*

*Books by Helene Magaret*

THE TRUMPETING CRANE

THE GREAT HORSE

FATHER DE SMET: PIONEER PRIEST OF THE ROCKIES







PIERRE JEAN DE SMET

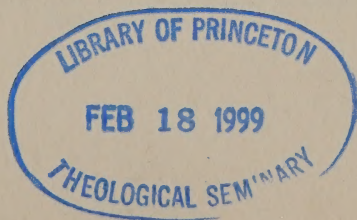


# FATHER DE SMET

*Pioneer Priest of the Rockies*

BY  
HELENE MAGARET

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FATHER DE SMET

*Pioneer Priest of the Rockies*





# I

## The Indians Go Crazy After a Drink

1839

### I

Father Pierre Jean DeSmet sat astride a crossbeam of the half-finished new church. His build, too heavy for a man not yet forty, lent dignity to his movements. His hand holding the hammer was thick-skinned, and the giant muscles of his arms and shoulders bulged beneath his cassock. Chopped off below the ears in a Dutch bob, his hair framed a full, congenial face. Over his heart he wore a large crucifix bearing the naked body of Christ. Resting a moment, he glanced down the dusty road that led from the Potawatomi village to Boat Landing, where the Missouri River made a horseshoe curve to the east.

He noticed that Indians and half-breeds were gathering along the road. Between the gaunt, ill-shapen cottonwood trees shafts of morning sunlight intensified the scarlet and blue calicoes of the women and turned the naked children to dark gold. With half a dozen clean hammer strokes, the priest drove a nail into a joist. Then he studied the Indians again. The group drew slightly apart, and a new color changed the pattern. It was Peter Sarpy's striped green shirt. The American Fur Company factor did not often come so early in the day. Something was wrong. But without so much as a frown to modify his placid expression, the priest drove a second nail. Some half-breeds who had been squatting torpidly before their lodges now joined the crowd. From his perch, Father DeSmet could see how roughly the fur trader shoved them aside. Well, no matter. Peter Sarpy must be tired and hot. A long, unpleasant walk, those four miles from the dock to the village. Yet the thought had no sooner entered the priest's

mind than he wondered why he was always justifying his friend. It was time he spoke to him frankly. He would do so at the first opportunity. He saw the Indians fall back rebuked. A moment later the fur trader was climbing up the knoll on which the skeleton of the new church stood.

"Father!" he shouted, as he wiped the perspiration from his face with a red bandanna. "Techabe's squaw's been killed."

The priest swung himself down from the crossbeam. Brushing the loose hair from his forehead, he stood with legs apart. His straight nose, widening into the serene double-arch that formed his brows, his delicate gestures, the inflections of his voice all betokened a Catholic European background. "She was a good woman," he said. "Who did it?"

Peter Sarpy leaned against the doorway. He was a short, broad-shouldered man, with firm jaws and the determined manner that wins confidence. "We don't know. Jim found her by the issue-house this morning. She's been slashed pretty badly."

Father DeSmet fingered his crucifix. "Where is Techabe?"

"Dead drunk. We couldn't pull him out of it. He'll be all right this afternoon."

"That means four new orphans for Mother Duchesne." The priest spoke quietly as if to himself. "I will send them down the river when the boat comes back, but the sisters cannot accommodate any more."

"The men will bring her body back sometime today," Sarpy said, turning to go, but the other man's voice drew him back.

"Since the first of June three horses have been cut up alive, eight natives murdered, three crippled or mutilated. The brains of one child have been dashed out against a post. Your company, Monsieur, pays a high price for its furs."

The trader looked at the missionary with disconcerting steadiness. "Father, I would give my right hand if I could stop it. You know that."

"Yes, I understand." Father DeSmet clapped him on the shoulder affectionately. "I suppose there's no secret about where the whisky is hidden?"



"They landed fifty cannons down by Mitchell's shack. Well, I'll send the body over."

Again the fur trader turned to go, but this time the priest accompanied him.

"By the way, my friend, how much does a cannon hold?"

"Thirty gallons."

"*En effet!*" Father DeSmet customarily thought in French, for that language was his spiritual heritage. Rarely, in moments of excitement, he resorted to his native Flemish. Now he had kicked a lump of clay with his bare foot and was watching it tumble down the road in a wisp of yellow dust. "Ever since the liquor traffic was made illegal the situation has grown worse."

The fur trader was wiping his face again, but this time not from perspiration.

"Mr. Mitchell came back last night with a new horse," the priest said. "He was looking for you."

"By God, I pity the beast. He rode his last mare to death."

"At least he over-estimated her endurance." Father DeSmet smiled. "But you gentlemen treat your horses better than your brothers in Christ."

"I'll go down to see Mitchell this morning," Sarpy said.

"To be sure, a horse has a market value, an Indian does not. When I was at the seminary in Whitmarsh my superior used to say, 'We must make men before we can make Christians.'"

"How long ago was that?" Sarpy asked, grasping eagerly at a shift in the conversation.

"Sixteen years ago, when I was young enough to think he meant the natives."

"I didn't know you'd been in this country that long."

"Yes, a long time, Monsieur. Shall we not go to my cabin and have a drink before you start back? You have a long walk ahead."

Leaving the road for the shade of the cottonwood trees, they strode through the long grass to a narrow footpath which led to the priest's hut. It was a one-room cabin constructed of trunks of fallen trees and covered with a rough shingle roof. In summer

the rain dripped through it. In winter snow piled up inside the door.

As they stepped through the doorway the two men felt at once the cooler air inside. Sarpy sat down and glanced absently at the scanty furniture: a bench, a bed, and a table on which were a number of books and papers arranged with the utmost precision. Against one wall a built-in shelf was crowded with diverse articles. From it Father DeSmet took a jug and filled two glasses.

"America's a pretty fine place for a fellow like me," Sarpy said, his eyes upon the books. "But for a man with education . . ."

"It is a good place for anyone who has a vision," the priest answered, offering his guest one of the glasses. "There are Christians, my friend, but there is no Christian civilization in the world. We might have built one here."

"I know, Father. I'm pretty tough myself, but I married my squaw. You know that. And I go to confession."

"It is not that sort of thing I am talking about," Father DeSmet said, sitting down on the table corner. "Did you ever hear of the missions in Paraguay?"

"In Paraguay? No. That's down in South America, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it might have been any place. It was God's kingdom once." Father DeSmet held up a tattered book. "The whole story is told here. If you could read Italian, I'd give it to you. Peter Sarpy, you don't know what the American Fur Company is doing."

The trader emptied his glass and set it on the table. "What happened in Paraguay?" he asked, but there was no interest in his voice.

"Two hundred and fifty years ago the Jesuits pushed through the jungles down there and converted a tribe of Guarani savages."

"As you're doing here," the trader said.

DeSmet shook his head. "No. That is what we came for, but it cannot be done. In Paraguay, it was different. There was no fur trade, no liquor, no men to buy the native women for a

handful of cartridges and beget syphilitic children on them. When the Jesuits were expelled in 1767 by the king of Spain, the Indians owned over seven hundred thousand head of cattle and as many horses and sheep. They were harvesting hemp and indigo, floating it down the Paraná River to the white settlements below. The Jesuits who built that civilization rotted in the prisons of Buenos Aires. Now only the stone ruins of their churches remain, but for a while Heaven dwelt upon earth."

Sarpy smiled incredulously. "Father DeSmet, you're a dreamer."

"That was no dream, Monsieur. It was reality. What good does it do to teach the Potawatomis their prayers in the morning when they are dead drunk by afternoon? The Guaranis were indolent and profligate too. By God's grace they changed. They worked in the fields, singing litanies. The missal sheets they designed would have put to shame the monks of Monte Cassino. And when the angelus rang, Peter Sarpy, they knelt, and bowed their heads, and offered themselves to the Blessed Saviour."

Father DeSmet got up and refilled the trader's glass. Then he stood at the cabin window, looking out into the sunshine. "It was a long time ago when I first read that book by Muratori and learned about the missions in Paraguay. We were seminary students in Mechlin then. Five of us decided we would carry on that work over here. We were afraid our families would object, so we ran away. First, we hid in an apothecary's shop. Then, disguised as peasants, we fled to Holland and took ship for America. God has given us burdens. We have been disappointed. But we have not yet given up."

"God himself couldn't make saints of the Potawatomis," Sarpy said.

Father DeSmet laughed grimly and turned away from the window. "No, Monsieur, not so long as the devil and the American Fur Company are friends."

Sarpy reddened. "I'm sorry, Father, but you don't understand."

"Perhaps you are right," the priest said wistfully. "But when



your company has exterminated the Indians, the fur trade will be over."

"We're not trying to do that."

"What happened two years ago is a sore that will not heal."

"You mean the *St. Peter*?"

"No, not the *St. Peter*, but what came afterwards. It was a misfortune to let the Indians on board that boat when it was carrying smallpox. It was an indiscretion to let Mr. Halsey stay at Fort Union with the disease. But what I had in mind was the murder of thirty women to save the fur trade."

"Murder!" Sarpy exclaimed.

"Mr. Mitchell tells me that when the Indians began to die there was such a stench in the fort it could be smelled three hundred yards away."

"Those women died of vaccination," Sarpy said quickly.

"Ah, but you forget! There was no vaccine. They died of smallpox virus. You know as well as I that it was convenient to get everything cleaned up before the Indians came in for the fall trade. Had the women contracted the sickness in the normal way, business would have been tied up all winter." Father Desmet was leaning against the table now. His eyes were fastened upon the trader's face, and the muscles about his mouth were drawn tight. "You see, Monsieur, I know the story."

"It's a grave charge you're making, and one that can't be proved."

"I wish that it could be disproved," the priest said. "I am not accusing you, my friend. If you had been at Fort Union, it would never have happened. For that reason I want your help now."

"You have it, Father," Peter Sarpy said, getting up. "But there's no hope for either of us."

"There is always hope in God. Never forget that."

The fur trader trudged slowly down the dusty path among the scrub oaks, where bees hovered in the dry grass and little white butterflies flashed here and there among the weeds, vanishing and reappearing like the recurring twitches of conscience.

The priest watched him until once more he was only a patch of green among the red and blue calicoes of the Indians.

Father DeSmet picked up his hammer and started back to the church. Gazing at the small, plain building made of cottonwood timber which gleamed in the sunlight, he thought of the old church of Notre Dame in Termonde, Belgium, the town where he was born. As a child he had played in the shadow of its tower, a rugged, magnificent monument of stone, with a bell which for four hundred years had made articulate the suffering and forbearance of all Flanders. The priest remembered how, as a half-grown boy, he had once led an attack against the mountebanks of a traveling show, who, with their trumpets and noisy carnival booths, were interfering with Mass. That day he had felt like Christ driving the money-changers from the temple. Yet even then the moment of his triumph had been short-lived. As he recalled those early years of his life, he knew now that Termonde was never a happy place, no happier than this squalid Indian village of the frontier. It was true that the fur traders were coarse-mouthed and given to drunken brawls. But had not the city of his childhood been haunted by stern, angular fishwives with the hunched shoulders of hawks, women who would curse God when the fishing boats did not come in and would later lay their flowers in contrition at the Blessed Virgin's feet?

Lost in these thoughts, the priest had climbed halfway up the church knoll when he was startled by the familiar scrape of a squirrel. Turning around, he caught sight of a pair of brown shoulders and a tangle of black hair behind a clump of currant bushes. The Potawatomi boy peering at him was so emaciated that the bones of his cheeks protruded sharply and the flesh underneath fell back, making dark hollows. A scab covered his left eye. He was holding a bass for the priest to see.

"Pouli!" Father DeSmet called to him. "What a fine fish you have!"

The child grinned stupidly. "Sister sick," he said. "You come."

The priest returned to his cabin. From the built-in shelf on the wall he took a brass vessel of water and filled a small bottle.

Then he collected some medicines, mostly popular remedies, putting them all into a bag.

As he left the cabin a second time it seemed to him that the heat had grown more intense. The sun glistened on oak and cottonwood leaves, and the earth was hot under his bare feet, the dust of it sifting up between his toes. Along the path warty lizards slid into their holes and flies buzzed noisily with a nervous, zigzag motion. An odor of stagnant water drifted up from the river to mingle with the offensive smells that always lingered about the Indian huts. The earth lodges of the Potawatomis appeared from the outside no more ingenious than a cluster of gopher hills. But the lice-infested children that played about them, the lazy dogs, the groups of men and women throwing dice, and the conglomeration of bones, rags, cast-off food, and other refuse scattered over the ground added color as well as a filthy disorder.

Pouli's mother half-slouched, half-lay against the door of her lodge. Her dress, wet with perspiration, clung to her long breasts and the swollen abdomen beneath them. A partly sewn piece of hide lay neglected across her knees, the bone needle plunged through one end. At Father DeSmet's approach she muttered, without moving, "Child sick."

The priest felt no repugnance, only pity. "You have never listened to the word of God, Kwiwatenokwi," he said mildly, "neither you nor your husband."

The woman threw her work to one side with a gesture of exasperation. "We no want God," she growled. "You cure child. That enough." Her breath came in short, audible gasps, as with great difficulty she struggled to her feet.

Inside the lodge a narrow shaft of sunlight shot through the smoke hole, favoring only dead ashes on the hearth. Everything else was dark. The horse stalls to the side were empty, but the smell of dung remained, and a gray bitch suckling a litter of whelps growled as Father DeSmet stumbled among paddles, wooden bowls, mattocks, and other articles.

The sick child lay against the wall, one hand flung over her head, the other pushing the blanket back from her body. Her



face, long-chinned and sharp as an arrowhead, was turned away from the light. Kneeling on the ground beside her, the priest put his palm against her hot face, and then felt her pulse.

"*Quel dommage!*" he said under his breath. "My child, have you pain?"

She moved, opened her parched lips to answer, but, as if finding the effort too great, closed them again.

He pulled the blankets down and in the semi-darkness examined her bony, undeveloped chest, but found no rash. Then he took three bottles from his bag. One of them he held up for Kwiwatenokwi to examine. "Give her two spoons of that tonight, and two tomorrow morning. It is a good medicine and should break her fever."

"Will it make her well?" the woman asked as she took the bottle.

"If you would pray . . ."

"Dog!" she snarled, drawing back. "God for fools! Ouil-mette pray one day, dead the next."

From the second bottle, the priest poured camphor water upon a cloth and began to bathe the child's face, smoothing the gummy hair back from her brow. She closed her eyes, eased not only by the gentle, rhythmic strokes but by the temporary relief from flies.

"Kwiwatenokwi," Father DeSmet said, "will you go out and gather some pepper grass for me? Some that is tall and fresh. Two handfuls will be enough."

"For her?" the Indian asked sullenly, making no movement to go.

"Yes, for the child."

"Grass no good," she said emphatically. "What for?"

He did not answer but waited awhile, wiping the child's face slowly with the cloth. When he was certain at last that Kwiwatenokwi would not leave, he uncorked the third bottle. Leaning over the child, he poured the contents three times upon her head in the form of a cross, saying softly but distinctly, "*Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.*"

The sacrament was administered quickly, but suspicion welled in the woman's heart. "Is it medicine?" she asked slyly.

"Medicine. The best there is," Father DeSmet put his hand on his crucifix, silently asking forgiveness for this half-lie.

"To make her well? For what are the words?"

"Yes, Kwiwatenokwi," he said, "that medicine will save her."

## 2

As the priest left the Indian lodge, the wild, defiant cry of a sandhill crane struck the air. Two huge, dark wings rose out of the brush. All at once the grasses bowed, and the distant bluffs blackened. Father DeSmet noticed that overhead slim specks of swallows circled restlessly under tumultuous, yellow clouds. He turned toward his cabin, but a wind swooped down and blinded him. He saw the Potawatomis scurry into their huts like prairie dogs. Blowing up from the river, the gale whitened the air with sand, so that a warm, dry, pitting blizzard assaulted the trees. Father DeSmet felt sand in his teeth. His cassock was speckled with it. He covered his face and peered at the storm through the lattice of his fingers. Mad eddies of leaves were whipped along the hill; branches snapped; trees swirled and were folded to the ground. Then he saw a shadow down the road, like a small, gray eddy of flying sand. It was moving, elongating; and as it came nearer he discerned two men carrying a canoe on their shoulders.

Alone, fighting the wind with half-shut eyes and holding his hands over his aching ears, the priest stumbled down the road. One of the Indians wore a torn hide shirt; the other was naked save for a breechclout. They were smaller boned, fairer skinned than plains Indians; and across the canoe lay a robe made from the hides of mountain sheep. They had come a long way.

"*Klyeeyou!*" one of them cried, seeing the priest. Then, leaving the boat in the road, they ran forward, fell upon their knees, and pressed their foreheads to the ground.

Although Father DeSmet touched their shoulders and bade them stand, they continued kneeling, kissing his robe, and cry-

ing "Klyeeyou!" with soft, excited voices, while tears dripped down their cheeks.

Since they did not understand English, only by going up the road alone could the priest induce them to relent in their adoration and follow him to his cabin. There they sat upon the floor, as quiet and sharp-eyed as cats. From one of the Potawatomi huts Father DeSmet fetched a kettle of thick soup made from meat and the wild roots of plants. The strangers were hungry. Disregarding the horn spoons he provided, they held the bowls to their mouths and did not lower them until the last drop of food and grease had been consumed. Father DeSmet refilled the bowls, making no further attempt to talk with his guests until the kettle was emptied.

Then the smaller of the two men spoke, forming the words slowly and with difficulty. "*Je suis Pierre Gaucher. Celui-là est Ignace. Nous venons des montagnes.* We are Flatheads."

"Flatheads!" Father DeSmet echoed the word in amazement.

"We want a priest," the other man said in broken French; and between every word he uttered Father DeSmet was whispering a prayer.

All afternoon and evening, while the wind whistled under the cabin eaves, the three men talked. Then they slept, the priest upon his bed and the two Flatheads with buffalo robes spread under them on the floor.

The next morning their canoe was once more pushed into the river. Father DeSmet and the Potawatomis watched it floating with the current toward St. Louis, until it disappeared behind a bend.

When the fur trader's ferry docked that morning, the priest was waiting at Boat Landing. All night he had thought how Peter Sarpy, firm-chinned, had shrugged his shoulders and said helplessly, "There's no hope for either of us." The priest wanted to talk with him again.

"I will ride back with you," he said when the fur trader was ready to recross the river.

He stood on the barge, watching Sarpy as he dexterously shoved the ferry into the river by pushing one of the sweeps



against the bank. The brown water slushed noisily about the logs, and the current drew them downstream. A sharp, reiterated cry pierced the air, seeming to come from nowhere.

"Plovers," Sarpy said briefly, his attention riveted on the sweeps at the stern of the boat.

Father DeSmet studied the empty sky. The calls came again, this time nearer. Then a flock of birds suddenly veered over the water. Their white breasts gleamed in the sun like pearl, and the bars across them were sleek black. In a moment they had fluttered down the river, so low their dull-colored backs and wing coverts became indiscernible against the sand.

"They fly erratically," Father DeSmet said, "like creatures of impulse."

The fur trader nodded. "Everything out here is like that, Father. The river can't keep to its channel, the weather fools us, the Indians go crazy after a drink . . ."

"Ah, Monsieur!" the priest interrupted him. "That is what I want to talk about. You think the liquor traffic will continue?"

"Not only continue, but get worse," the other man said with conviction.

"But the government agents and the law . . ."

Sarpy dug an oar into a sandbar under the surface of the water, forcing the barge back into the channel. "I thought we talked that over yesterday. I wish I could help you, Father, but there's no law on the frontier, except the law that lies in a man's hip pocket. The government agents can't do anything."

The priest saw the water dimple as it sucked at a cottonwood snag. "If there were enough government forts between here and the Great Divide, would it not be possible to control the fur trade?"

"The West is too big, too unruly. Did you ever try to break a buffalo calf?"

"And the Potawatomis twenty years from now?"

"They won't last that long, Father. They were a small tribe to begin with. Whisky has already reduced them. It's my guess that in five years only a handful of beggars will be left."

The plovers were flying back, uttering their sharp cries.

When they had passed over, Father DeSmet turned to the trader. "By the way, Sarpy, what do you know about the Flat-head Indians?"

"The Flatheads! Nobody knows anything about them, Father. There's a legend down in St. Louis . . ."

"That's what I want to hear," the priest said.

Sarpy grunted and for a moment gave full attention to the sweeps of his barge. "I don't suppose it's true. Not all of it anyway. But they say that about eight years ago, when General Clark was superintendent of Indian Affairs, four of their tribe showed up in St. Louis. They didn't know a word of English, but somehow Clark found out that they were looking for a priest. Two of them died. Couldn't stand the city air, I guess. And the others were sent home."

"How far west do they live?"

"A damn sight farther than you or I will ever get. See where the current's cutting through that arm of sand? By next month I'll have another bar to worry about. If the story's true, those Indians were fools. They could have cut over to the Canadian settlements and found a priest within eight hundred miles; or they could have gone west to Fort Vancouver. Some years later another Flathead came down to the Green River Rendezvous. The men took him to a Baptist minister who was there, but nothing would do but a black skirt and a round collar. Well, that same winter there were some Flatheads in St. Louis again. This time they talked to Bishop Rosati, but I guess no priest wanted to go up to that God-forsaken hole in the mountains."

As the barge was drawing close to the west shore, Sarpy stopped talking. He held the tow in his hand until they were quite close; then he tossed it over a pile, drawing the boat flat along the pier. The two men climbed onto the dock. The trader drew a pipe out of his pocket and began emptying his tobacco pouch into the bowl. His soiled shirt, open to the belt, was dripping with perspiration.

"How do you suppose those Indians ever heard about priests?" Father DeSmet asked him.

"From the Iroquois, maybe. You know they moved west

with the Hudson's Bay trade." Sarpy drew on his pipe deeply. "But there's another chapter to the story. That's the part I don't believe. I got it from a trapper who swears it's true. How he found out, I don't know. Those boys come back with a lot of queer tales. This trapper claimed that a couple of years ago some Flatheads started out once more for St. Louis, still hoping to get a priest. That time they went by way of Fort Laramie and fell in with some white men who were also going east. After a few days a band of Sioux attacked them. One of the Flatheads, a fellow named Old Ignace, was dressed like a white man. He'd been somewhere in Canada and got a suit of clothes. The Sioux haven't got any grudge against the whites, you know, on account of the trade, but they lined up the Flatheads to be killed. Well, they thought Old Ignace was a white man. But he wouldn't stand for it. No, he tore off his shirt and showed the scars on his chest; and they killed him with the rest."

"Did you ever see a Flathead?" Father DeSmet asked.

"No. But I've heard tell that they're little fellows and light skinned. Why are you interested in them?"

"Two Flatheads stayed with me last night."

Sarpy took the pipe from his mouth. "By God, Father! Where are they now?"

"They wanted a missionary. I sent them down to St. Louis to see the bishop."

"Perhaps the whole story is true then," Sarpy said.

"Perhaps it is," Father DeSmet murmured. He was looking over the muddy, turbulent river. The current sucked at the piles beneath him. The sun felt warm and pleasant on his face. "To be sure," he added lightly, "I came here for a purpose. You once promised, Monsieur, to show me your collection of peltries."

Later that day the priest sat in his cabin writing a letter to the bishop, but even as the Latin words slipped from his pen he wondered if it was God's will that he leave these people, who were slovenly only through ignorance and corrupt only through the vices of the whites. He had baptized Kwiwatenokwi's child the day before, against the will and knowledge of her

parents. Last night she had died; and now Kwiwatenokwi was saying that the priest had brought about the girl's death by pouring water on her head and repeating a strange curse. He had been able to do that good only through deceitfulness and increasing the hostility of the natives. So it would always be in the future—winning the children away from their parents, the husbands from their wives; covering the sins of the white men for the sake of the white men's God. Was he not like the sower in the parable, he asked himself, whose seed fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured it? Should he not cultivate better ground and bring forth fruit a hundredfold?

Although Father DeSmet had never been west of the Missouri River, he knew that the valleys of the Rocky Mountains were as isolated and impregnable as the jungles of Paraguay. It was true that the Flatheads might carry their furs north to Fort Colville or south to Fort Hall, but the trek across the mountains must be a difficult one. Furthermore, he had heard that Hudson's Bay Company was niggardly with its rum, realizing perhaps that the benefits derived from the liquor traffic were less than the evils. In any event, white civilization would never reach the recesses between the Rocky Mountains and the Coast Range. Of that he could be certain.

Through the cabin door the priest could see a Potawatomi squaw, her red dress like a trumpet flower in the sun. She had stretched a string between two trees and was hanging some roots to dry. A naked child pulled persistently at her skirts and would not be shoved away, as if, in spite of its mother's outward indifference, it had faith in her love. So it seemed to Father DeSmet that, in spite of hardships and disappointments, the Flatheads had clung to their faith in God.

The priest looked at the words he had just written: "If it should be pleasing to your Lordship . . ." He knew what his colleagues in St. Louis would say—that he had failed among the Potawatomis, that the fight was too hard for him, that he was taking the easiest way. Was he? The priest laid down his pen and tried to consider the question coldly.

Five years ago he had made a trip to Europe and in return-



ing was taken so ill that the ship had to put ashore at Deal in order that he might be removed. For months he had waited for the disease to abate, and finally, after a long discouraging struggle, in the spring of 1835 he had relinquished the greatest happiness of his life. He had severed his connection with the Society of Jesus because of ill health. Now, as he sat at his rough-hewn work table, thinking of the past, all the gloom and misery of those dead years swept down upon him once more. From the moment he had signed his name to his resignation he had felt like an orphan, like a creature fallen from God's hand. He had returned to his birthplace, Termonde, where for three years he had bent over the account books of the orphanage, prayed with the novices of the Carmelite Convent, and watched old women pass between the cloth-hall and the fish market. As clearly as if it had happened yesterday, he could see the physician bending over his bed, saying, "If you ever go back to America, you will die." So he had stayed in Termonde three years, thinking more of his body than of God's will, so it seemed to him now. When he had returned at last to be reinstated in the Society, the disease was still with him. He looked husky enough, he knew that, with his excessive weight and clear skin; and he had more endurance than half the men he knew. In recent years he had known what it was to have no shoes, to go without food, to sleep in foul places; but he had always been with other white men. They had clung to one another in trouble. It would be different in the Rocky Mountains. No priest had yet penetrated those forbidding canyons. No traders had built their cabins on those wind-swept crags. If he went there, he would go alone. If the old disease struck him again, he would die alone, saving God's grace.

A heavy pounding on the door interrupted his meditations. An Indian burst in. He was breathless. Sweat rolled down his cheeks and over his naked shoulders. The whites of his eyes struck fear into the priest's heart.

"Father, Father," he said hoarsely, "come quick! Panapi hurt his uncle. Almost dead."

With no sign of emotion other than the trembling of his

hands, the priest silently began gathering his medicines and slipping them into a bag. "How did it happen?" he asked without curiosity, having heard the answer so many times.

"With a club. He drunk," the Potawatomi replied.

Father DeSmet was already at the door when he bethought himself. "Wait for me a moment," he said.

He went to his work table and, picking up the letter addressed to the bishop, he read again the unfinished sentence, "If it should be pleasing to your Lordship . . ." No, he was not taking the easy road. Hastily he finished the letter: "I offer my services for the glory of the Blessed Lord and our Society."

## II

### The Rivers Flow West

1841-1842

#### I

It was pleasing to his Lordship, and the following year Father DeSmet visited the Flatheads. After five months across the desert and over the mountains, far beyond the last white trader's hut he found the strange, legendary tribe of the Bitter Root Valley. Already the Indians had learned the rudiments of Christianity. Some of them believed that they had seen visions of the Virgin Mary and had heard angels moving among the boughs. Here, if anywhere, the priest thought, the Paraguayan missions could be built again.

Father DeSmet, however, had been sent only to learn the disposition of the savages.

"I will come next year and stay," he promised them when he left in the autumn.

In accordance with that promise, the following spring he was crossing the desert again, but this time not alone. His party, consisting of two other priests, three lay brothers, and the guide, Tom Fitzpatrick, was traveling with some emigrants to California. They had left Westport in May. Now, in midsummer, they had been halted north of the Platte River, in a vast, undulating, treeless plain. The men with feverish impatience were shoveling dirt from the level land into a gulch. Although it was long past noon, the caravan could not move forward until the gully had been filled and a roadbed laid. The men stood waist-high in sage. The twisted bark and sharp leaves, which at a distance looked as soft as sheep's wool, scratched their hands.

Close to the ground the grama grass had been cropped away, indicating that a migration of buffalo had moved northward sometime before. The starved earth had given no sign of life all day save for one sparrow hawk that hung a moment midair, beating its wings and crying out. Some of the workers were half-naked, their rags revealing bodies blackened from the sun like well-tanned hides of deer. These were the teamsters. Others wore waistcoats and pantaloons cut in the latest fashion, but now frayed and dusty. The priests and lay brothers, being accustomed to manual labor, handled their shovels with more rhythm and endurance than the emigrants from the East.

Behind them the halted caravan was scattered for a quarter of a mile among sage and greasewood: first, the five small carts of the missionaries, then eight wagons drawn by mules and horses, and finally five wagons drawn by seventeen yoke of oxen. The animals were fagged; they drooped in their harnesses, sad-eyed; their ears were flattened against their heads. A number of women and children sat on the ground dejectedly watching the men at work. They squinted in the strong sunlight, and their faces, bitten by scorching winds, had a coarse, brittle appearance. Little beauty lingered in their bodies.

Father DeSmet worked with his legs spread wide apart, and the wind tangled his cassock about his heavy body. His clean-shaven face contrasted with these disheveled men. Ten weeks of hot winds and pitting sand had not chiseled him into their image, nor would thirty years. They were bearded and dry-skinned, like the sage-bearded land. Even the emigrants had already taken on the look of the desert. The priest, on the other hand, was still a foreigner. In spite of its tan, his skin had a well-cared-for appearance. His blue eyes had the sparkle of champagne.

Leaning on his shovel, he studied the plains which flattened out in every direction, broken only by outcroppings of naked rocks. "Ten days ago," he mused, "the Lord made a pattern, and he has been repeating it ever since."

At that moment some black and white magpies flapped out



of the brush. As their wings caught the sunlight, they dazzled for a moment bronze green, purple, and blue.

Father Gregory Mengarini stopped singing. "*Mira! Mira, Padre!*" he cried, gesticulating. "Those birds disprove your statement."

The Italian was slighter in build than his companion, and he worked with short, quick strokes. His full lips, which curled like a woman's when he laughed, seemed to repeat the lines of his curly black hair. All the way from Westport to the desert he had sung to himself, sometimes quaint snatches from Palestrina, sometimes half-remembered melodies which he had heard as a child on the streets of Rome. He had a soft grace of manner and, being both a linguist and physician, a versatility which the Church esteems in its clergy.

"Once we get into the mountains the country won't be monotonous," Tom Fitzpatrick, the guide, said, sliding his three crippled fingers down the shovel handle. "You'll wish you were back in sagebrush again. Beyond Fort Hall traveling is damned hard."

The third priest, Father Nicholas Point, stood to one side watching, his sketchbook under his arm, his hat pulled over his eyes to serve as a sunshade. Slender, sallow-skinned, with a thin, long face and discolored teeth, his sickly appearance excused him from heavy labor. He was a Vendean by birth, but the students at the seminary used to say that he suffered the melancholia of a Spanish monk. "We ought to leave the organ at Fort Hall," he suggested, "and send for it later."

DeSmet shook his head. "No, Father Nicholas. We cannot disappoint the ladies. Think of the earrings and bracelets that paid for our organ. Would we dare leave it in the desert while Madame Durat kneels in church without her gold pendant? Besides, I promised it to the Flatheads."

"What ladies?" Fitzpatrick asked, curious.

"I went on a begging tour last winter," DeSmet replied.

"As a mendicant friar he would become rich!" Father Mengarini exclaimed with admiration. "Wherever Father Pierre walks the Christians cast gold at his feet."

DeSmet laughed. "The Catholics in America, Monsieur, are deeply interested in missions."

The men fell to work again, silently, with drawn faces. In spite of the gaiety of their conversation, they were exhausted. The gulch was only half-filled, and the sun had already begun to decline.

As he worked Father DeSmet could hear the voices of the women on the bank. Amelia Bidwell was holding a map.

"You can see," she said to the others, "there are two wide rivers that rise in the big lake and empty into the sea. That's why the lake is salt. It's a sea-water lake."

Then another voice came to the priest. "Fitzpatrick says your map's no good."

"And what does he know?" Amelia Bidwell scoffed. "He's a Rocky Mountain guide. Elam Brown lived in California two years. He'd know if the map was wrong."

"It would be a lot easier going by boat. We had good cabins on the Ohio River steamboat."

Looking up, Father DeSmet saw a young girl gazing wistfully over the dead waste that stretched far off to meet a line of buttes on the horizon.

The woman was folding the map carefully. "There wouldn't be any steamboats on these rivers. We'd have to make bullboats or canoes."

"I never got chills and fever before, not in all my eighty years." A parched, withered old woman, with blue lips and bloodshot eyes, had joined the group, trailing a heap of shawls and blankets behind her.

"It takes patience, Grandma. Are you warm enough?" The old woman's daughter began tugging at the shawls. "Why don't you get back in the wagon?"

"I've got sores from settin' in that wagon," she said, backing away. "You jest leave me alone." She shook her daughter off and tottered down to the edge of the gulch where the men were working. "Do they have ague on the coast?" she screeched at them.

Big-mouthed, robust John Bidwell wiped the sweat from

his face. "Well, Grandma, there was one man that had a chill in California. It was such a wonderment the people of Monterey drove eighteen miles into the country just to see him shake."

"Rats!" the old woman muttered.

"Grandma, you should go back to the wagon and stay out of the wind." Father DeSmet threw down his shovel, climbed out of the gulch, and led the old woman away.

When he returned Father Point met him. "Every time I dozed last night Brother Specht coughed and wakened me."

"Poor Brother Specht," DeSmet said, picking up his shovel. "That cough is unfortunate. It is making him thin."

"If it were just once," Point continued, "but half a dozen times . . ."

"We will all sleep tonight." Father DeSmet turned his back and started away.

Father Point tightened his lips against the discolored teeth. "Père Pierre, you could sleep in a cowshed." He spat the words testily.

Fitzpatrick was pushing tobacco into his pipe. "There's one sickness worse than ague," he said to DeSmet in an undertone, "and they'll all have it when they get to California."

Bidwell had not heard. He dug into the bank of the gulch. "Robidou says the oranges are so heavy they break the branches, and a man with a hundred dollars can triple his money in three days."

"It ain't going to do no good if we starve on the way." The man who said this picked up a clump of earth and threw it angrily across the gulch.

"You don't need to worry about starving, Bill," John Gay, the hunter, said. "We'll see some buffalo."

"This is the third day you've been saying that," the man called Bill retorted. "I'd like to know where they are."

"You saw those bones on the other side of the Platte. That's a sure sign."

"Yeah. Those bones looked like they'd been bleaching five years."

Bidwell glanced toward the western horizon. "Robidou says in California . . ."

"Hell! We don't give a damn what Robidou says," Bill interrupted. "He's got more lies in his mouth than a tobacco chewer has spit!"

Bidwell turned on him. "Why did you come?" he asked, his voice raised to a shout. "Why don't you go back—go back and peddle your worthless rakes and hoes to the poor fools on the Mississippi levee!"

"Monsieur," DeSmet protested, "he is worn out."

"Well, he don't need to snarl at me just because he's tired," Bidwell growled.

The setting sun shed a rose color over the desert, deepening the northern bluffs, darkening the gray earth tossed into the half-filled gulch.

"My God!" John Gay cried out, pointing toward the northwest.

A long line of blotched forms loomed black against the horizon. Ominously threatening they looked as they stood almost without motion, gigantic even in the vastness of the plain. The herd of buffalo, apparently moving down-wind, had caught no scent of the travelers. A hush fell upon the men as they stared. The women drew back and clung to one another for a moment frightened.

"They would come when our horses are worn out," the hunter said quietly, putting down his shovel. "But we ought to get something out of that herd."

Fitzpatrick had already gone for horses.

"Do you want to come along?" John Gay asked Father DeSmet.

"How far is it?"

"Not more than a mile, if the wind's right." He took a feather from his pocket and tossed it into the air. "We're just to the leeward. But we'll have to work fast to get through before dark."

Fitzpatrick brought three of the running horses. "You'd



better take the roan," he said to John Gay. "She's in the best condition."

The priest mounted a piebald pony; and the three men rode slowly toward the herd of buffalo.

"Keep behind the sage as much as possible," Fitzpatrick advised Father DeSmet. "And when we're ready for the chase, rein your pony in hard. We don't want you to get mixed up in this."

They crossed the plain cautiously, always keeping where the sagebrush grew thickest. Their horses' hoofs made a soft noise as they crunched the grama grass, but the buffalo took no notice. Gradually, as sunset faded to twilight, the shaggy forms loomed larger and became more terrifying. The land, which had stretched out like an undulating plain, now proved to be broken by hillocks and gulches.

"Look," the hunter whispered, pointing toward a ravine which appeared to skirt the ground upon which the bison were feeding.

Fitzpatrick nodded. "Can we break into it without too much noise?"

"We'll find a place."

They followed the gulch for a short distance, until they located an opening free of brush. Then they turned their horses into it. The ravine was just deep enough to hide them. The horses moved at a slow walk over the dry, stony bed. Looking up, Father DeSmet saw that the sky was growing gray. Then time seemed to stop, for, as they continued moving on and on through the bed of the ravine, the clear, gray heavens remained unchanged. At last John Gay lifted his hand. Fitzpatrick and the priest drew rein, waiting. Just above their heads they could hear the measured cropping of teeth upon grass. The strong musk smell of the animals came on the breeze. The ravine had brought them close against the herd. Father DeSmet's heart thudded. He saw the hunter pointing. Above the edge of the ravine, not fifty yards away, appeared a number of hairy humps. They were bobbing up and down. The thought came to the priest that were something to frighten the herd it could at a

moment's notice stampede through the gulch and trample the men to death.

One long, breathless moment the men waited. Then John Gay raised his whip. Instantly the two horses plunged through the brush and over the gulch. Father DeSmet pulled his pony back so hard that the reins cut into his hands. The earth shook with the thunder of frantic hoofs, and a mad bellowing drowned the scream of the piebald pony. A moment later the priest too rode over the ravine. He saw the herd, almost hidden in dust, rushing pell-mell to the north; and in the rear a cloud of dust where Fitzpatrick's horse at a full run was just nosing the flank of a bull. A gun flashed. Then he caught sight of John Gay on the little roan. The hunter's hand was lifted, his gun pointed behind the shoulder of a shaggy beast. Father DeSmet pricked his pony to a trot. The herd was running on in wild rage, but the beast at which John Gay had shot wheeled about, wounded. The priest saw it lower its head and charge the hunter. The roan reared, pawing the air in fright. Then another shot and the buffalo stumbled to its knees. The herd rushed forward, Tom Fitzpatrick still keeping with it.

Father DeSmet galloped up to the hunter. The buffalo lay on the ground, an immense, shaggy mass, heaving and hissing in agony. In the twilight the blood that poured from its open mouth made a dark pool upon the light-colored earth.

The hunter wiped the sweat from his face. The cords stood out on his neck. "I could have gotten more than one," he said, panting, "if this devil hadn't charged me."

"You must have picked the worst in the herd," the priest said, looking at the animal with pity. "Why don't you kill it?"

Gay drew his gun and shot the wounded beast between the eyes. Its head fell over heavily, crushing the grass.

A few minutes later Fitzpatrick rode back. The rumble of hoofs was already far off. "You did a good job, Gay. I've got a cow down there, but she's pretty lean. The teamsters are coming with the carts."

Father DeSmet turned around. In the distance he saw half a dozen tiny lights swinging through the thick dusk.

"I'll wait for them," the hunter offered. "You two may as well go back."

Father DeSmet and Fitzpatrick spurred their horses toward the swinging lanterns.

"How many did you get?" one of the teamsters shouted at them.

"Only two. Gay's waiting for you."

As the carts rattled past, the men could see the lights of the campfire beyond.

"We can eat all we want for a few days," Fitzpatrick said.

Father DeSmet was too tired to sit up with the others that night, too tired even to pray. Only once he wakened in the darkness to hear far off the wolves howling over the two carcasses which the skinners had left behind.

Day after day the caravan dragged over the sage. It seemed to the priest that the whole country had died and been eaten by the wolves, and that all that was left were dry bones half-buried in dust, bleached by the sun, and splotched with sick, dwarfed plants.

Sometimes John Gay, riding with the priests, would say in the morning, "Fathers, do you see that speck in the distance? Today we must reach there."

Mengarini, ignorant of the plains, would answer, "Ah, Signore, then our day's travel will be short."

"We shall see," the old hunter would answer, crinkling his eyes, which were as faded as the landscape.

The hours of the morning would pass; the afternoon sun would burn the faces of the teamsters, parching their throats, breaking the hard skin of their lips, before that speck assumed appreciable magnitude and distinctness of form; and a ponderous, brown twilight would crawl over the desert while still some miles intervened between the travelers and the willow grove that offered water and rest.

On nights when they had no food, men and women sat together around the fire, remembering the bison that two weeks before had swept northward.

"At least we won't be trampled to death," Father Point said,

as he sat by the firelight sketching John Gay's face. Whenever he held a pencil the priest was in a happy mood.

"They cost us a pretty sum of gunpowder," John Gay answered.

"Father Gregory thought they were trees."

"Ah, but they were trees!" Father Mengarini lifted his eyebrows with mock seriousness. "The Lord can move a forest easily, with the little finger of His left hand."

"They do look like trees when you see them in the distance on a hill," Fitzpatrick put in.

Point closed his sketchbook. "*Ma pauvre petite!*" he sighed. "She is a good mule, but will not live long. Three days, perhaps."

"We'll get to grass before then." Bidwell, having stretched himself on the ground, began to scratch his chin. "Goddamn these whiskers . . . Father DeSmet, where do the Flatheads live?"

"They are nomads, Monsieur," Father DeSmet replied. "They roam between the Bitter Root Mountains and Puget Sound. Twice a year they move into the Blackfoot country for buffalo."

"How are you going to find them?"

"I spent a month with them last summer and promised to return. They will find me."

"I'd say you're putting a lot of faith in a bunch of good-for-nothing savages."

DeSmet laughed softly. "It all depends on one's sense of values," he said.

The men stared into the fire until the silence had been held so long each hesitated to break it.

Then Bidwell rolled from his back onto his stomach and looked at Father DeSmet. "What are you going to do with them?"

"With the Flatheads?" The priest was somewhat embarrassed. "Monsieur Bidwell, we hope to take a new way of living into an old land."

Bidwell chuckled. "That sounds upside-down to me. It looks like you're taking an old way of living into a new land."



"No," Father DeSmet replied. "Only once, in the jungles of Paraguay, has the thing I'm speaking of been tried."

"What happened down there, Father?" Fitzpatrick asked with his customary curiosity.

"A group of natives called the Guaranis became Christianized."

"I wish you luck!" Bidwell exclaimed. "If I were you, I'd let the coyotes run wild. It takes a long lariat to catch them."

"Perhaps we shall find one long enough, Monsieur," the priest answered.

After the monotony of sagebrush and sand, the travelers were squeezed between a cleft in a chain of low mountains. The circuitous bed at the foot of these walls was cumbered with trunks of trees, timber half decayed, pile upon pile, that cracked under the hoofs of the horses and left them floundering fetlock deep in a network of fir stumps and branches. The Sweetwater River, constricted into a narrow channel, rushed thundering by, and the cliffs echoed its roar like a pine forest in rising wind.

"At any rate," DeSmet thought to himself, "Father Nicholas won't be able to hear Brother Specht cough."

He could see the teamsters vainly shouting to one another, but only the tumultuous water shrieked in reply. Then the river broadened into a wide, open valley almost entirely free from timber. To the north the Wind River Mountains rose out of a dark blanket of trees, brightly snow-capped and towering.

"This is South Pass," Fitzpatrick said. "From now on all the rivers flow west."

"And when we reach the Great Salt Lake those rivers will carry us to the sea," one of the women said dreamily. She was straight and lithe as an iris in the wind, and the hair blowing off her forehead was like two wings. "How far is California?"

No one answered her question. No one knew. The emigrants gazed across the valley in amazement.

"I knew we wouldn't have any trouble crossing the mountains," Bidwell said.

"You'll have plenty of trouble later on," Fitzpatrick answered.

"But this is the Continental Divide, isn't it? Now we're over the top."

Father Gregory was riding beside DeSmet. "It is rather undramatic. I expected to be on the crest of one of those snow-capped peaks."

"You are higher than you realize," DeSmet said.

In the days that followed they descended toward the Pacific, crossing the Little and Big Sandy Rivers. Then, off the trail for three days, they wandered lost through a white, dry valley, sometimes singing to keep their courage up, more often praying. Although Fitzpatrick never spoke a word to betray himself, Father DeSmet knew the meaning of his long glances toward the horizon, and his anxious searching for a familiar butte or hoof-prints and ashes marking an old trail. On the morning of the fourth day, with thirst clawing at their throats, they reached the banks of Green River. Two hours later, the wagons, twisting and straying in all directions, were jogging amid a labyrinth of crags and chasms. More than once the men were obliged to open a road in the bottom of a ravine, on the slope of a cliff, or through the brush. More than once Father DeSmet and the Italian priest helped to unhitch the mules, double the teams; or, with their own hands, supported the carts on the edge of an abyss or held them back in some too rapid descent. Again and again Father DeSmet was thrown upon the croup or neck of his mule, or suddenly tossed under her hoofs.

"If this continues," he said, laughing, "I shall be rid of my fat, and Father Nicholas, who is handy with the shears, can make me two cassocks out of the one I am wearing."

Half a dozen times Father Mengarini, dazed and bruised, crawled out of the brush, still humming a tune from Palestrina.

After ten days of clambering over the cliffs of mountains until the beasts were lame, the hands of the men bleeding, and the clothing torn from their backs, they reached the chasms and lava beds which form the cradle of Bear River. Here they drank from foul-smelling, sulphurous springs and scooped basins of white soda from the ground.

"Wyeth and Tom McKay have been here, and some men

think when Bob Stuart came back from Astoria thirty years ago he followed Bear River. But nobody's tried to get a chain of wagons through before," Fitzpatrick chuckled.

Father Point came up to him. "We will never get over that range."

DeSmet breathed deeply. Broad-shouldered, strong, he seemed like a human counterpart of those enduring mountains. Suddenly he called to Father Mengarini. The latter priest walked quickly, for his body moved at this height easily, without effort. Then all at once he stopped. His heart thudded against his ribs.

"Be careful," Father DeSmet warned him. "This attenuated air plays tricks on one." He took Mengarini's arm, and with a circular motion of his left hand, he encompassed the whole range of snow-capped peaks. "Father Gregory, this is the one place in the world where we can rebuild the Paraguayan missions. Civilization will never penetrate those canyons, not in a thousand years. And west of the Bitter Root Valley are other mountains. No fur traders, no liquor traffic, no steamboats; and the Flatheads are already saying their prayers!"

Father Mengarini caught the enthusiasm of his companion. "Everything was prepared and waiting for us centuries ago," he said. "Is it not so, Padre? And we had to discover it as Columbus discovered the . . . *Mira!*"

The caravan stopped abruptly.

"Root-diggers!" Fitzpatrick said. "As harmless as prairie dogs."

From behind a jutting rock emerged a band of wretched horses of all colors and sizes, with gaunt ribs and shaggy hides and fresh sores on their flanks. They were loaded with boxes and baskets to a height equal to their own, and upon these mountainous burdens, perched as high as Arabs on the humps of their camels, sat human beings, also of all colors and sizes. The skin of their faces was like paper which has been rolled into a ball and spread out again. Their bright rags hung shapelessly upon undernourished bodies. One of the animals, no bigger than an ass, sagged under four large bags of dried meat, over which were tied a number of other bundles terminating in a platform on the

back of the beast; and on the summit of this, at a precarious height, a very old, very skinny person, naked save for a loin-cloth, was seated cross-legged on a bearskin, smoking his calumet. A scarred, one-eyed hag, apparently his wife, was similarly mounted beside him.

Fitzpatrick had no gifts for them, and they passed by gingerly, looking back many times, like children or beggars, until they were lost in a chaos of rocks.

At the soda springs, where Bear River reverses its direction in a great bend and turns south, Fitzpatrick and the missionaries bade farewell to the emigrants bound for California, whose route lay along the southern course of the river.

"I don't think one of them will get there alive," the Irishman said as he watched them in the distance. "No emigrant train has crossed the Rockies to California yet. Their maps are all wrong; they haven't a good guide; they've got nothing but John Bidwell's dreams."

Father Point's narrow shoulders were cramped together. "One way's as good as another," he said dourly. "I'm cold."

DeSmet took off his coat and tossed it to him. "Take this. It's too heavy for me to bother with."

Mengarini bit his lip in embarrassment.

Then the missionaries on their mules and the lay brothers driving the carts turned north.

## 2

At dusk in mid-August the missionaries' carts passed through the open gates of Fort Hall. Lights gleamed from the low buildings that surrounded the circular inner court. Frank Ermatinger, trader for Hudson's Bay Company, came out to meet the priests. He was a tall, blond man, with a ruddy face and flashing gold teeth.

"So you did come back!" he bellowed at Father DeSmet. "My God, you fellows must have had a hard pull. You look like a pack of beaten wolves. Well, Tom Fitzpatrick, how are you? Trust the priests to get the best guide in the country. Go right into the mess hall, and I'll get the cook down. Johnny



Frost!" he shouted. "Hey, Johnny Frost, hurry up and look after these mules."

The employees of the fort had begun to issue from the lighted log buildings. They grouped themselves around the priests and stared silently.

"I guess we do look as if we had fought the Sioux," Father DeSmet said, glancing down at his torn cassock and his hands, which were scratched and bruised by the rocks he had scrambled over. "Maybe we can persuade one of the squaws around here to sew us into our clothes again."

The steamy food smell of the mess hall was comforting. The warmed-over meat and turnips tasted good. The priests ate heartily, for the most part answering Ermatinger's questions in monosyllables.

"We can send you away with flour, sugar, and a supply of salt," the trader was saying. "That's what we call the Holy Trinity around here. The Holy Trinity—pretty good, eh? Flour, salt, and sugar. You got to have them in this country to be saved."

Instinctively Father DeSmet did not like this blustering Englishman, so different from the restrained Fitzpatrick and the forthright Peter Sarpy. But he had long been accustomed to the rough conversation of trappers and traders. He noticed, however, that Father Point frowned disapprovingly. Well, his companions would have to get used to the careless ways of these men, he thought.

"Have you seen anything of the Flatheads?" he asked the trader.

"There's six of them here right now, waiting for you. They've been lying around here for the last month, camped on the north side of the stockade. Hey, Cook, Cook! Hain't you got some decent coffee for the priests? This stuff looks like dish-water."

"It is quite all right," Father Mengarini said politely.

"No, it ain't," the trader contradicted him. "I tell the cook to make the coffee weak for the employees. It's damned hard to get, out here."

The cook, a short, plump half-breed in a greasy apron, appeared and removed the coffee cups.

"You're taking a pack of bedeviled coyotes under your wing," Ermatinger said to Father DeSmet. "Do you know that? A pack of bedeviled coyotes."

"What do you mean?" the priest asked.

"I bought furs from them for eight years, I did. They have visions. They go into trances. Seclusion in the mountains has made them crazy."

"Yes, they are mystics," DeSmet agreed.

"I don't know any tribe I'd rather live with," Tom Fitzpatrick said.

"I had a *coureur de bois* with me one year," the trader continued, "and he wore a cross on his watch chain. Right here." He pointed to a button on his vest. "A big, gold cross. You couldn't help but notice it. My God! Those jolly little devils stared at it as if they was hypnotized, and they didn't know what the word 'Christianity' meant, they didn't."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," Father DeSmet said. "How much flour can you sell me?"

"They have dreams and see visions, and used to forget to bring their furs down. They're so plumb daft they don't know what money means. I never seen the like."

Father DeSmet smiled. "You may be surprised, Monsieur Ermatinger, to know that I believe in their visions."

"By Jove!" the trader exclaimed in surprise. Then, to hide his embarrassment, he began shouting at the cook again. "Hey, you, what's the matter with the coffee? You hain't gone to sleep out there, have you?"

The cook rushed into the room in such confusion that the coffee he was carrying slopped down his apron.

"You Protestants are all descendants of St. Thomas the Apostle," DeSmet was saying. "Being rationalists, you need proofs and reasons. We Catholics rest in our faith. It is the spirit, the flower, Monsieur, of our religion."

The door of the mess hall opened, and Johnny Frost, the man who had taken the mules, appeared. "I had Gabriel Prud-

homme tell them you would come as soon as possible. But they want you now. They can't wait."

"Who in hell are you talking to and what about?" Erma-tinger bellowed.

Johnny Frost reddened. "I beg your pardon, sir. The Flat-heads want to come in. They've heard the priests are here."

"Well, keep them out. We hain't got enough food."

Father DeSmet laughed. "I trust I may be excused," he said to the trader. "My friends and I have been separated for a long time."

Mengarini and Point also made their excuses, leaving the perplexed Englishman with Tom Fitzpatrick and the lay brothers.

By the campfire outside the stockade Indians and priests sat together, Father Mengarini, like the Flatheads, cross-legged on the ground; but Father DeSmet, being too corpulent to assume that position, squatted upon his heels. The Indians wore feathers on their heads or fur caps ornamented with buffalo and goat horns. Their coarse, thin hair, gummy with perspiration and dirt, flopped over their shoulders, and when they spoke they displayed teeth that were rotting away.

Across the fire from Father DeSmet sat Pilchimo, one of the bravest of the warriors. He was uncommonly tall, handsome save for a red gash across his face. Next to him was the blood son of Old Ignace, who had been slaughtered by the Sioux. Baptized Francis Xavier in St. Louis at the age of ten, he was to devote himself later, with the submissiveness of a lay brother, to the humblest tasks of the mission. Father Point, standing a little behind the group, looked at these new Christians with a curiosity not free from distaste. The smell of grease and leather which exuded from their bodies nauseated him. To Father DeSmet, on the other hand, it was comfortingly pleasant, as stable smells are pleasant to a lover of horses.

"In the night, Father, when we hear dogs snarling, we know it is Old Simon," Francis Xavier said. "Three and four times he will crawl from under his blanket. He rakes out the live coals upon his hearth; he crosses himself; and he prays."

DeSmet turned to Old Simon, whose body reminded him of decaying leaf mold under the trees. Even seated by the fire the old man leaned heavily upon his stick. "It is a fine thing, but not necessary," the priest said to him. "You will make yourself ill."

Old Simon looked at the ground. "Father, Father, it is because my sins are so heavy. I waken in the night and the burden of them makes my back ache, but praying eases the pain."

"We told him not to come with us. He is too old." Young Ignace said this, the Flathead whom Father DeSmet had loved upon sight because his features reminded him of pictures he had seen of the blessed St. Francis. "As long ago as the day when I strung my first bow, Old Simon was shrunken-faced and half-blind."

"That is the way with the young," Old Simon said scornfully. "They would cast me off with the widows. It is true I cannot fight. But if I die hunting the Blackrobe, I die nobly."

"It was Old Simon who brought the boy," Pilchimo put in, indicating with a movement of his head a naked child who lay sleeping by the fire. His hair, which apparently had never felt the touch of a comb, hung about his face in a halo of black cobwebs. He twitched restlessly in his sleep and now and then scratched himself without opening his eyes.

"He wanted to come," Old Simon defended himself. "He is an orphan. I put him on my horse. I said to them, 'He has no father and no mother. Let him go. The Blackrobe will be both to him.'"

Father DeSmet rose, gently gathered the child in his arms, and sat down with him. Wakening, the boy touched the priest's cheek, with wonder in his eyes, and then fell to picking the dirt from around his toenails.

"Once, when we were without food for three days," Ignace said, "a wild deer came to our camp. She was a young doe with good flesh on her. She stood so close we could have touched her. Father, it was the Sabbath. We did not shoot. She fled into the hills. The next day God sent us a stag."

"Some of the men murmured against you. They tried to



cause trouble, saying you would not return." Francis Xavier gestured with the calumet. "But Insula, he would not listen. 'The father is not double-tongued,' he told them. 'He said, "I will return," and he will.'"

"Insula is a good man, a Christian," said Father DeSmet. "He is like a blood brother to us all. And the Blackfeet? Are you at peace with them?"

The Indians hung their heads like repentant children. Each waited for one of the others to reply. Finally Gabriel Prudhomme answered the question. "They would exterminate us if we did not fight. When all but seventy of our men were on the big hunt, they attacked us. Over a thousand of them. Early that morning we prayed. We fought them, and not one Flat-head was killed."

"But Sechelmeld was wounded," Pilchimo said. "He pulled an arrow from his skull, but he will not die. All day he lies on a blanket in pain. 'Not until I am baptized,' he says, 'can I die.' Father, when we get to the camp, first of all give him the water on his head, that he may die and see God."

"I promise that," Father DeSmet said, as he stroked the child's tangled hair.

Young Ignace was touching the priest's cassock, caressing it gently, as he would the hair of a woman. "It is not only the Blackfeet, Father. We had to fight the Bannocks. There was no other way. We had killed nine and were pursuing the rest over the east hill, letting our arrows fly, when Insula remembered it was Sunday. At his signal we all stopped and returned to camp. We did not dress our wounds. We fell upon our knees and prayed."

"Do you remember Walking Bear?" Old Simon asked.

"I baptized him Peter," DeSmet said. "Indeed I have not forgotten him."

"A Blackfoot came in the night to steal a horse. Someone wounded him. He had a gun and threatened to kill anyone that approached. Walking Bear . . ."

"Peter," the priest corrected.

"Peter ran up and killed him with a club. Then he fell on the ground and prayed for God's mercy."

"Peter is very old to kill a man with a club," DeSmet remarked.

"Will he go to hell?" Old Simon asked.

"No, Simon," the priest answered, smiling. "God has forgiven him, for he killed in defense of his people."

Some hours later the three priests were wearily undressing in the little room which had been assigned to them by the fur trader.

"I wonder how it will feel to lie between clean sheets in a bed again?" Father DeSmet asked.

Mengarini had already stretched himself out full length on one of the cots. "Padre," he said, "you must have performed miracles the month you spent with the Flatheads last year. You have turned them into angels."

A light flashed in DeSmet's eyes. "No, it was not I, Father Gregory. It was God. He has been with them all year."

Father Point sat on the edge of the bed, awkwardly sewing up a rip in his cassock. "I don't doubt it," he said dryly, "but they smell worse than the gutters of St. Louis."

### 3

In the weeks that followed, through the desert north of Fort Hall and along the barren, tortuous Snake River, the Indians and missionaries dragged their carts toward the Flathead camp. Over their heads the white-breasted bluebirds of the mountains were already flying south. To the right of them, like the tepees of some immortal manitous, towered the Three Teton, to the left the Three Buttes. Ahead slumbered a chaos of steep ravines and granite boulders, which were small hindrance to the Indians riding on horseback, but which again and again threatened to break the wheels of the cumbersome wagons or send them catapulting into an abyss. For eight days there was no grass. The horses grew thin and performed their labor with mechanical submissiveness. The men lived upon a diet of fish, sucking the sharp bones long after the flesh was gone.

By the time the travelers had moved northward out of the dead land into green mountain valleys, the low shrubs under the evergreens had turned maroon. The elderberries hung their heads in yellow grass. Before the middle of September snow began to fall, at first gently, dancing like the white wings of insects. Then a wind rumbled among the boughs and drove the snow slanting against the cheeks and eyelids of the missionaries.

"I think these Indians have pitched their camp at the North Pole," Father Point said. "We've been moving north for four weeks now."

"It is no colder than Rome at Christmas time," Father Mengarini answered stoutly, "and it is much more beautiful. In Rome the basilicas were made by man; here they have been fashioned by the Lord."

Father DeSmet touched the flank of his mule and rode up to his companions. "It is going to be more beautiful than ever before. What a city could be laid out in one of these valleys! What vineyards and orchards! It would have been hard to do our work farther south where the land is desert. God has been kind to us in sending us here. Ah, Father Nicholas, we shall not live to see the end of our labor, when there will be white roads winding over these mountains, and Indians harvesting the grain, and bells ringing from the steeples of the churches."

"Has it ever occurred to you, Father Pierre," Point asked him, "that Muratori may have exaggerated his story of the Paraguayan missions?"

"No, it hasn't," Father DeSmet said, pulling the collar of his coat closer about his face. "But no matter. If the story were all a lie, Father Nicholas, I would still think that it had been written to help us do what has never been done before, to build the Kingdom of God upon earth."

Halfway up the side of a mountain they stopped to rest the mules. The valley far below them lay white under the first blanket of snow. Here and there they could see patches of yellow, for the aspen trees had not yet shed their leaves. Then the wind veered, driving the snow into their faces again, and the whole valley was obliterated by a whirl of falling flakes.

By noon of the next day the snow had disappeared at the touch of a warm wind. After ascending a gap in the hills at the foot of gigantic pine trees, from whose branches drooped festoons of sooty black moss, the missionaries found themselves on the declivity of a rocky mountain, with sheer precipices and narrow defiles, and six hundred feet below them the green line of a river dividing the willow shrubs by the fraction of an inch. The trail ahead rose almost perpendicularly, winding among gray and lavender rocks, streaked with the blue-green of copper or the orange of ferrous oxide. The leafless bushes dragged their loads of scarlet and purple berries over boulders and down vast ledges of stone. Apparently no birds had soared so high.

Twice by claspings his mule's neck Father DeSmet saved himself from sliding down her back. He was a good horseman but not accustomed to riding at such an acute angle. Every thrust of the animal's body jerked him precariously off balance and threatened to toss him into the canyon bed below.

"Pilchimo!" he called to the Indian riding ahead. "The mule is doing fine, but I shall soon be in the river down there."

The Flathead stopped and dismounted. "Father," he said with a gravity that tempered the bluntness of his remark, "you are too fat."

It was the first time that Father DeSmet's two hundred and eleven pounds had annoyed him. The Indians sat their horses easily, as if they were habituated to scaling crags. "Yes," he said sadly, "I am too fat. I would make a juicy roast."

Pilchimo laughed. "Get off the mule, Father. Hold her tail."

Father DeSmet dismounted. In embarrassment he clutched the tail of his mule in his right hand and with his left flourished the whip. The beast hesitated a moment, astounded at this new arrangement and at the vigorous beating she received from her rider. Then slowly and deliberately she continued the ascent, dragging the priest along the ground behind her.

From the summit of the mountain a wild winding path led downward. Coiling among boulders, again and again it seemed to be carrying them to the edge of a cliff from which there



could be no return. Then abruptly turning at a right angle, they would once more be pocketed among rocks.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Father DeSmet muttered under his breath. "Here the world is uncreated. We are back in the primeval ages."

To be sure, the massive piles of rock resembled a prodigious quantity of uncut stone lying neglected in some vast atelier, awaiting the hand of an infinite sculptor to give them form. Once this idea had occurred to the priest he was pleased to fancy himself riding through the world of uncreated things. He singled out hulks of stone, boulders, parapets of rock, overhanging walls, and tried to imagine what the hand of the sculptor might turn them into. Here could be cut the dome of St. Peter's—there, the Mycenaean Gate of Lions—beyond, an entire city with castle and fortress walls. So absorbed was he in playing this imaginary game, that he did not notice that he had strayed a little from his companions until the intervening rocks hid them from view.

"No, it is not material for a sculptor," he thought. "Sculpture is an art that can be measured. This is immeasurable—boundless. It is the stuff of music." Then it seemed to him that sound must have originally been chiseled from such hard substance, for with all their weight and immensity, these rocks were neither oppressive nor heavy. Their surfaces were flexible. They danced with delicate tints. Sometimes they were flecked with yellow-green, like the high, quick notes of a piccolo. Sometimes they receded under a deep mauve shadow, like the complaint of a 'cello as the bow is withdrawn.

All at once the mule stopped. Father DeSmet found himself on a rocky projection which terminated in a point about two feet wide. Before him was a perpendicular descent of three feet, on his left towered a rock straight as a wall, and on his right yawned a precipice of a thousand feet or more. It was impossible to turn around. The priest caught his breath. He crossed himself. He uttered a brief prayer. Then he dug his spurs deeply into the sides of the animal. She made a bold leap and they landed safely upon another parapet. Father DeSmet

dismounted and knelt for a moment with his head bowed. Already the Flatheads had begun to hunt for him. The prayer concluded, he lifted his head and saw Pilchimo's mule outlined against the sky.

The Indian rode down to meet him. "By tomorrow we will be at the camp," he said. "Father, will you stay with us forever?"

"I hope so, Pilchimo." Father DeSmet put his hand on the Flathead's shoulder. "Your people are my people. My home is with you."

The following day they rode into a cedar and pine forest so dense that they could not see twenty yards ahead of them. "*C'est impossible!*" the priest said, as if the vision would disappear upon being denied. Mammoth trunks rose high into the air, and far up the fine dense foliage formed a dark, impenetrable arch. It seemed to Father DeSmet like a lofty vault supported by thousands of columns, each as high as the whole tower of St. Rombold in Mechlin.

Beyond the forest they followed a narrow path at the foot of a canyon, and suddenly, without warning, rode into the Bitter Root Valley. From every direction Indians rushed toward them, waving their hands and shouting. Hundreds of dogs ran among the Flatheads, growling, biting one another, jumping at their masters. They were lean, gray animals, with long legs and sharp fangs. Father DeSmet was conscious of a terrible noise and confusion, of hands pulling at his cassock, of innumerable brown faces and sharp eyes. Then he saw, standing apart from the crowd, a young woman, bare-headed, holding a red shawl across her breast. Two thick, black braids hung over her shoulders. Something in the strength of her body and her dark eyes reminded the priest of those Italian peasant women whom the old painters of the Renaissance transformed into the Mother of God.

Father Mengarini had also noticed her, for in a moment, when the crowd seemed to fall back, he drew his mule next to DeSmet's and asked, "Who is that woman? The one in red."

"That is Mina-Yougha, Father Gregory. The younger wife of Ignace."

Then a bevy of Indians surged between their mules, and Father DeSmet suddenly felt himself being pulled from his beast onto the ground.

Francis Xavier stood above him, indiscriminately kicking dogs and Indians away until the priest had gotten to his feet. "Father, give me your whip."

DeSmet reached for his mule whip and handed it to the Indian, who at once began lashing the dogs so violently that the priests were enabled to make their way toward the lodge of Chief Big Face. The Flatheads crowded about them as they passed through the narrow lane of the village flanked on either side by winter lodges. These were built half underground, with entrances to the south, through which the Indians lowered themselves to the floor by means of notched logs or crudely made ladders.

In one of them Chief Big Face was awaiting the priests. He was the first Flathead to receive baptism the year before and had been given the name of Paul. His guests sat on a bear rug, smoked the calumet, and listened once again to the stories which they had heard at Fort Hall.

"In the time of the star-flowers," Big Face said, his voice like the rush of a waterfall, "on the day when rain beat against the grass roofs, you said that God wanted us to cease roaming, to choose a home for always, and build a lodge for Him."

"Yes, Paul." Father DeSmet was eating his dog meat soup with a hearty appetite. "Where we can pray and make earth bear food for us."

"We chose this spot," the chief said. "Here is water. Here is grass for our horses. Will God like it?"

"You have done well," the priest answered gravely. "God is happy here."

Dumbfounded, Father Point gazed at the chief. The monstrous, long-nosed head nodding upon its little body was like that of a fantastic marionette, or rather like a hideous Eastern idol. The man at his best was unpleasant to look upon, but in

honor of the Blackrobes, he had painted his face with red, blue, and green stripes. However, behind this terrifying mask of paint and deformed flesh, his flashing black eyes were friendly, and an extraordinary sweetness softened his smile.

Having broken the laws of hospitality by pushing his soup away after a single taste, Father Point sat hunched forward, his sleeve defending his nose against the Indian's stench.

Big Face was staring indignantly at the uneaten bowl of soup.

Father DeSmet felt chagrin for his companion. "Is Sechelmeld still alive?" he asked the Indian.

"He will not die without the water on his head," the chief replied, without lifting his eyes from the offending sight.

DeSmet got up from the bear rug and walked to the foot of the ladder. "Come and show me his lodge."

Big Face stood stiffly, waiting for the priest to ascend.

Father DeSmet bowed. "You are the chief, Paul. I follow you." He almost shoved him up the ladder. Then quickly he took Father Point's bowl, drank from it, and handed it to Father Mengarini. "Father Gregory," he whispered, "hurry—for the sake of Mother Church—" Then he called up the ladder, "Be patient, Paul. There is good meat on my bones and I climb clumsily."

Mengarini drank so fast he nearly choked. He could hear Big Face talking outside.

"Beyond, where smoke curls to the lower branches of that tree, he waits for you."

"I will see him today."

When they returned, the wooden bowls were all empty. The chief looked at them. He sat down before the fire. Father Mengarini belched. Father Point was studying his hands. The Indian nodded his enormous, idol-like head. Reaching for the bowl, he said cunningly to Father Point, "I will give you more food."

"No, no," DeSmet interposed. "Father Nicholas must go with me to see Sechelmeld."



As hastily as possible the priests took their leave and climbed the ladder.

In accordance with the promise he had made at Fort Hall, Father DeSmet baptized the dying Indian. Then he went to the hut of Ignace.

"He is not home," Mina-Yougha said. "Wait. He will come soon." She was making moss cakes, lifting handfuls of slimy, black mush from a wooden dish and patting them into shape. Her thick hair fell over her shoulders. Her movements were like music—three pats and a pause and three pats again, and another handful of moss.

Tchata, the older wife of Ignace, sat by the fire, scraping hair from the hide of a mountain goat. The strong, stubborn outline of her back was turned toward Mina-Yougha. At the priest's appearance she looked up, grunted, and continued her work.

Because it was warm in the lodge, the dogs had crept back from the fire to lie against the wall by one of Mina-Yougha's children, a thin little girl who slept with her tousled head between the forepaws of one animal and her knees on the flank of another. An older child, Keepele, stood watching his mother.

Father DeSmet seated himself comfortably near the fire. "Ignace was gone a long time," he said cheerfully.

Tchata paused in her work. "He was not here when the others left. He had been hunting. When he came back his horse was lame and could not be ridden."

"Did you know he ran for five days to catch them?" Mina-Yougha asked eagerly. "He would not be left behind."

"That was fine of him," DeSmet answered. Then turning to the older child, he said, "Keepele, do you remember the prayers I taught you?"

The boy shook his head and backed against his mother's skirt.

"While you were gone," Mina-Yougha continued, "Telga-wee died. A strange thing happened."

"Shut up," Tchata growled. "It is not for you to talk. Let Ignace tell him."

"Let her speak," Father DeSmet said gently.

Mina-Yougha curled her lip and cast a triumphant glance at the other woman. "Just before she died, Telgawee opened her eyes. She cried, 'I see the Holy Mother Mary. How beautiful!' 'How is she dressed?' we asked. 'Does she have hair like an Indian's?' But it was too late. She was dead."

Ignace came down the ladder. "Father, Sechelmeld has died."

"I was with him," Father DeSmet said. "May he rest in peace."

The child Keepele took advantage of his father's entrance to reach for the bowl of moss cakes.

"No, no," Mina-Yougha said, pushing him back. "They are not done."

He remained at her elbow, watching with savage eyes.

"Sechelmeld was happy," the priest added, "but he has suffered much pain."

Mina-Yougha bent to pick up some mush that had fallen on the ground, and Keepele grabbed one of the cakes. The squaw forced open the thieving fist and removed the moss. "You are hungry, Keepele. But a man must learn to bear hunger."

"Keepele, come here," Father DeSmet said. "Let us say the prayer that I taught you."

The child shook his head. Then, with the quickness of a wild animal, he reached for the food a third time. Tchata leaned over and struck him under the chin so roughly that the blow sent him sprawling and sobbing to the floor.

Mina-Yougha dropped the cake she was kneading and stood up. Her hands trembled against her skirt. "You have struck my son once, hag!" she shrieked. "If ever a second time, I beat you with our man's rawhide whip."

The older woman looked at her rival with dull stolidity. "For Ignace I did it, fool. You make him a flower-hearted girl."

"He is my son," Mina-Yougha replied.

"A thief and a fawn," the other taunted.

"You a fine one to speak of Ignace's son!" Mina-Yougha cried, her voice rising like a killdeer's.

Ignace had reached for a rawhide whip. Quick as a flash he struck Tchata across the face, drawing blood. "Bitches!" he shouted. "The Blackrobe is here!" Lifting the whip above his head, he whirled toward Mina-Yougha.

Springing to his feet, DeSmet caught the Indian's arm. "Ignace, a Christian does not strike his wife."

The Indian looked at the priest in astonishment. "Father," he said impulsively, dropping the rawhide, "I have seen you whip your mule in the mountains." Then he began shouting at his wives, "Get out! Get out, you she-wolves. There is no room for women in my lodge when the Blackrobe comes."

Tchata, already halfway up the ladder, looked back with fear in her eyes. Father DeSmet could see the blood streaming down her cheeks. Mina-Yougha drew the red shawl over her shoulders and followed the older woman.

The priest dragged Keepele from among the dogs where he had taken refuge. "Keepele," he said, "sit down with me and let us say the prayer. I will begin and when I stop you go on."

The boy leaned against the priest's arm, looking confidently into his face.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven," Father DeSmet began.

The child's voice came clear and strong, without hesitation. "Hallowed be Thy name."

Ignace sat on the opposite side of the fire, smoking his pipe. When the prayer was ended he said, "Father, it is true, you have struck your mule. Why may I not strike my wives?"

"Ignace, a mule and a woman are not the same." Father DeSmet was holding the child under his arm. "It is not a mule that bears your sons. Heaven's grace comes to man and woman alike."

The Indian puffed thoughtfully upon the long stem of his calumet. "Father, God gave us the beavers for our use, is it not so?"

"Yes, Ignace."

"And he gave us horses to use?"

"Yes."

"And buffalo?"

The priest nodded.

"And, Father, God gave us women for our use also, did He not?"

"No, Ignace," Father DeSmet said, with increasing gentleness in his voice. "He gave the beavers, the horses, and the buffalo for the use of both men and women. You and your wives are equal before God. When He wanted to come and walk among us, He chose to be born of a woman. That was His way of telling us that the woman is to be honored as the man."

"Unless I beat her, Tchata will not obey."

"And Mina-Yougha?" DeSmet asked, with the ghost of a smile on his lips.

"That is different," Ignace said.

"Why?"

The Indian was silent.

"Is it not because she loves you?" the priest asked.

"She would die for me."

"Do you love her?"

The Indian said nothing.

Father DeSmet waited a moment. "Can you not see that it is wrong to buy a woman you do not love, as you would buy a mule?"

"But, Father, I got six horses and a white buffalo robe with Tchata."

"Did you ever think, Ignace, that if you had one wife instead of two it would be easier?"

"No, Father, I think it would be harder. Two women do more work than one."

The priest took his arm from around Keepele and rose. He knew that this problem could not be settled in one short conversation, and he felt that for the present enough had been said. "I must go to see Sechelmeld's squaw. Ignace, remember what I have said. Keep your whip for the dogs."



## 4

In November the cold, deadly winter of the Northwest swept into the Bitter Root Valley. Day after day the wind, howling in the trees, flung white gusts of snow over the Indian lodges and hid the wheels of the missionaries' carts. The river froze, so that Francis Xavier had to cut through two inches of ice for fish. By day Flatheads and priests worked together, felling trees for a church. At night the men, worn out with labor, wrapped themselves in blankets and buffalo robes, which in the morning would be all congealed into a single piece. In the temporary lodge where Mass was said, the water and wine turned to ice before the sacrifice was over.

Before Christmas, however, the lay brothers, with no other tools than ax, saw, and auger, had constructed a chapel of upright logs, filling the cracks with clay. They hung partitions of deerskin between the rooms and covered the windows with hide from which the hair had been scraped. The chapel had a pediment, colonnade, and gallery, balustrade and choir seat. Along the walls the priests hung the pictures of the Way of the Cross in red frames, over the tabernacle a picture of the Blessed Virgin, and on the door a representation of the heart of Jesus.

"It will be a little church of miracles," Father DeSmet said proudly, as he stood in the narthex of the new building. Even the cheap image of the Virgin in her gaudy robes and gilded crown seemed lovelier than the finest images in European cathedrals.

"It will have to be a church of miracles," Father Point answered sadly, "when we tell the Flatheads they must put away their extra wives."

Father DeSmet dipped his fingers in the stoup. The holy water was frozen.

"I think you are right, Father Nicholas," Mengarini said. "It will be like taking horses from the Crows. They will fight to the death for their squaws."

DeSmet fingered his crucifix thoughtfully. "We have put it off too long now."

Father Mengarini took the buffalo robe from his shoulders. "Father Pierre, you are cold. Put this around you."

"No. No, thank you. I am not cold. On the other hand, some of the Indians will be glad to get rid of the old wives no longer fit for drudgery. It will be better for the women too. Now they fare worse than horses and little better than dogs."

"Let us get it over with," Mengarini suggested. "Let us tell them today at the instructions."

Father DeSmet sighed. "All right, Father Gregory. I will tell them."

Immediately after the noon meal he went alone to the little chapel and prayed. He was still kneeling before the altar when the Flatheads came. As he rose to his feet and faced them, he saw Fathers Point and Mengarini standing in the back of the room. The confident, lighted eyes of the Italian reassured him. Slowly, diffidently he began his talk, explaining in the simple language of children how the first man and woman who walked upon earth were united to one another through their love for God. Then, as he tried to make clear to them the spiritual significance of human affection, all the hesitation fell from his voice. The problem no longer seemed difficult. It was clear, convincing, incontrovertible. In plain terms he drew for them the mystical triangle, the two lower angles of which represent the man and woman united by means of and for the sake of the angle at the apex, which is God. But when he emphasized that since there were only three angles, not four or five, or an indeterminate number, there could be but one man and one woman united, an astonished silence fell upon the Indians. Not a hand moved; not an eye responded to his words. At once an invisible barrier seemed to fall between him and his people. Every face became a cold, blank mask. He saw that Father Mengarini had moved closer to Father Point, but the challenging light in his eyes had not dimmed. The priest could hear his own words as they seemed to fall on the air without the assent of his will. His mind was filled only with the terrible realization that the Indians had withdrawn from him. He stood alone before the altar of God, speaking to the ears that would not hear, to the eyes that were blinded.

Desperately he groped for new words and new arguments, but none came. Never before had the Flatheads seemed so far away. Only the stench of their bodies told him that it was not a dream but reality, that he was losing the struggle, that they would not face the problem with him. With a quick gesture of awful fear and despair, he turned about and knelt before the gaudily painted image of the Blessed Virgin.

"Holy Mother of God, help us who kneel before thee to make this sacrifice for the sake of thy Son. Pray then that grace may be shed upon us, that the love of thy Son may strengthen us to do this thing which is so hard."

The unbroken silence behind him told Father DeSmet that the Flatheads had refused to kneel. The clarity of his voice failed; a sob caught in his throat. "O Mary," he continued huskily, "obtain for us that purity of heart which will attach us to God alone. Teach us that self-denial which will make us free of the unworthy passions of this world." He looked up into the face of the image, and for the first time in his life he was struck with the frightful inadequacy of the symbol. It was as if he had prayed to nothing but a doll. Now even the Mother of God had withdrawn. He was alone with the obdurate, unbending people behind him.

Father DeSmet bowed his head and a hollow silence filled the chapel. "*Domine, non sum dignus, ut intres sub tectum meum;*" he was whispering inaudibly to himself. The failure was his. His faith had died. Then out of the hushed, lonely despair a miracle seemed to happen. He heard a soft rustle of movement behind him, as the Flatheads fell upon their knees. Again he looked at the image, and now his voice rang full and confident against the walls of the church. "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary! that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection was left unaided. Before thee we stand sinful and sorrowful. Despise not our petition, but in thy mercy hear and answer us. Amen. Our Father who art in Heaven . . ."

He could hear the voices of the Flatheads joining in the *Paternoster*. Tears of thanksgiving were running down the

priest's cheeks. He wiped them away with his sleeve as he continued the prayer.

At the end of the service the chapel was filled with whispering. Huddled in their robes, the women went slowly back to their lodges. Many of the men, however, remained. They wanted to talk to the Blackrobe, and the question on all lips was the same, "Which shall I choose?"

For two hours Father DeSmet sat in the bare, unheated sacristy and talked with those who came to him.

"I have three wives," Walking Bear said. "I hate them. There is an orphan girl. She would come without a parent's gift, but I do not care. Father, she walks with the grace of a young hind. I wish to take her."

The priest looked into the face of the Indian with kindly, searching eyes, wondering how he could explain. "No, Peter," he said at last. "Suppose God loved the buffalo and wanted His people to kill only what they needed for food. If a man went hunting and killed three buffalo and brought them back, God would say to him, 'You have done wrong, for you can eat only one buffalo. Therefore, keep one and give the other two away.' If that man happened to see a bigger, fatter buffalo, would he please God by giving all three away and killing a fourth?"

Walking Bear sat on the floor like a huge, humped animal. He was very sad and meditative. "Father," he protested. "I have not killed the women. Another man may have them."

"But you have used them. They were young maidens when you took them from their fathers. They are worn-out women now, and you are an old man."

The Indian looked at the ground. "Yes, I understand. It would be wicked."

"Then you must leave the fourth woman to be taken by another."

Walking Bear rose to his feet awkwardly. "Father, she walks with the grace of a young hind. I will not take her."

Whenever the door of the sacristy opened the priest expected to see Ignace. But Ignace did not come.

After the last Indian had left, Father DeSmet went outside.



A bleak wind drove over the ice-covered river, where he could see that Francis Xavier was spearing fish. "Francis is lucky," the priest thought to himself. "He is unmarried and these problems do not touch him." As he walked toward the river the wind, cutting across his face, made his cheekbones ache; yet it was good to be alone. In spite of his fatigue, he felt a new freedom of spirit. Francis Xavier saw him, waved, and started toward him, crossing the ice with long, quick strides.

"Father," he said excitedly, "now I can buy Mina-Yougha." From inside his fur mitten he drew a gold cross which a priest had given him in St. Louis on the day he was baptized. "Do you think Ignace will take this cross for her? I will hang a necklace of bear teeth about her neck and lead her away. Father, there is no woman like Mina-Yougha."

"Francis Xavier, put your cross away. Would you sell your baptismal gift for a woman? Go back to your work, and pray God to put these thoughts out of your mind."

"What have I done?" the Indian asked in perplexity.

"We will talk these things over tomorrow," the priest answered, and he turned away wearily, realizing that new and unsuspected troubles lay before him.

As he walked along the river he became so preoccupied with his thoughts that he had gone some distance before he noticed tracks in the snow—moccasin tracks too small for a man's. They crossed the river and led towards the hills. To go into the mountains on a day like this was death. He studied them. They were fresh tracks. Now he noticed that his legs were numb with cold. Yet he followed the tracks hurriedly, across the river, up the bank, beyond the willow trees where snow drifted knee-deep, and from the willows into the pines. He crawled over dead trunks and sprang upon rocks buried in snow, without thinking of the danger that might be his. Still ahead of him the tracks made a pattern, straight, determined, and clean cut. Perhaps they were going to the creek where the Indians set their beaver traps. But no. All at once they turned, drawing a narrow trail between the trees, parallel with the course of the river below. Then they turned again directly up the side of the hill. Once the priest

stumbled and reached for an evergreen bough to recover his balance. A heap of snow fell over him. He shook himself and began to climb the slippery incline on hands and knees. Far up, on a large boulder overlooking the valley and the Indian village, sat a woman wrapped in a buffalo robe, motionless and dark. It was Tchata. If she heard Father DeSmet coming, she gave no indication of it.

"You must go home," the priest said. "You will freeze here."

"It were better that you go back," she retorted, "who have come among us bringing grief. Leave me alone."

The priest stood by the rock. Below he could see wisps of smoke twirling southward from the white humps of the lodges. The fishing hole where Francis Xavier sat was a dark blue disk on the snow-covered river. A black figure, no bigger than a crow, moved toward the chapel door. "I will not go unless you come with me," he said to the woman. "Do you want to die?"

"How can I want to die when I am damned?" There was no Flathead equivalent for "damned," and she spoke the French word with a desolate finality.

"We are all sinners, Tchata, but not one is damned. Let us go back together and talk about your trouble."

Slowly the woman got up, and they went down the hill in silence. Against the purity of the snow the Indian's dark figure seemed like a symbol of despair. They had almost reached the river before a word was spoken. Then Tchata for the first time looked into the priest's face. The agony in her eyes was like that of a beaten dog. "Ignace cannot have two wives now," she said dully.

"Has he chosen Mina-Yougha?" Father DeSmet asked.

"He will. I am dead inside."

"God is merciful," the priest said; "He does not impose burdens we cannot bear. Tchata, were you happy before I came?"

The woman sighed heavily. "No, Father, I was not."

"You had Ignace then and no fear of losing him."

"I have never had Ignace since Mina-Yougha came," she said bitterly.

"Then you are losing nothing."

"It is I who do the work, who am beaten and kicked and spat on like a dog, and everything is for her."

"If you leave Ignace you will not be beaten, Tchata. You will be free, freer than you were as a young girl when you had to come at your father's bidding. Will it not be better so?" They had entered the village and were walking toward Ignace's hut. "Has Ignace talked to you about this?"

"He has said nothing," Tchata answered.

They descended the ladder into the lodge. Tchata kicked one of the dogs as she entered, so that it rose and snarled, showing its fangs. Mina-Yougha was leading a line of fishnet. She sat with a cord across her knees, and on the floor beside her lay a heap of oblong rounded stones, each with a sunken groove near the middle. One by one she picked them up and fastened them into the cord.

"You have to leave," Tchata said to her. "Where will you go?"

"You are not master," the younger woman answered quietly.

"I was here first." Tchata took off her blanket, spread it on the floor, and sat down.

Father DeSmet looked first at Mina-Yougha, tall, strong, and beautiful; then at the older woman, who sat in a shapeless, dejected heap. "It is useless to quarrel about these things. Can you not both be at peace a little while?"

Tchata shook her head. "I have seen Francis Xavier look at her as a man looks at a horse he covets, his eyes caress her as a man strokes the flank of a horse he loves."

"Dog!" Mina-Yougha cried.

"If she goes another man will take her. If I go . . ."

Ignace was descending the ladder. The women fell silent, watching with fear in their eyes. He greeted the priest and sat down cross-legged before the fire. Tchata filled two wooden bowls with soup from a kettle and handed them to the men. Ignace drank rapidly, the grease dripping over his chin and onto his hide shirt. As he drank he made a loud sound. Mina-Yougha watched him and smiled, as if the noise of his drinking comforted

her. When he had finished eating, he wiped his sleeve across his mouth. Tchata had stuffed kinnikinnick into the bowl of his pipe. She handed it to the priest, who took three puffs and passed it to Ignace.

"Father, is it true I can have but one wife?"

"Have your wives been happy living together, Ignace?"

"Only today when I heard you, Father, did I think that happiness was for a woman." The Indian puffed his pipe in silence.

Mina-Yougha continued to knot stones into the cord. Her movements were steady, mechanical.

"If I keep Mina-Yougha, Tchata will have no place to go."

Tchata curled her lip slightly, just enough to show the edge of a black tooth.

"If I choose Tchata, Mina-Yougha and her children will have no home."

Mina-Yougha did not look up from her work.

Ignace fingered his pipe thoughtfully. "Father, I think it is better to hurt one than to hurt three."

Father DeSmet did not answer. He knew that Ignace had not told the real reason, that he loved Mina-Yougha and she returned his love. Nevertheless, hard as it seemed, it was the only answer. The hush inside the lodge was a live thing that hung in the air waiting. Mina-Yougha's work continued with rhythmical precision, but as the flame fell on her face, the priest could see her tears.

Quickly the priest took Tchata's arm and lifted her face, forcing her to look at him. "Tchata," he said, "you have had nothing in this hut but a bitter life and hatred, a hatred that has blinded you to the beauty of the bitter-roots flowering in this valley, a hatred that has made you a slave and has closed your heart to love. This freedom is God's gift. Come with me outside."

Dusk had already fallen over the little village. The snow gleamed blue-white on the ground. Far off the dark shadows of the mountains rose against the deepening sky. "Look at the world, Tchata," Father DeSmet said. "Is it not beautiful?"

Tchata kept her eyes riveted on the ground.



"Try to remember," he continued, "when you were a young girl. Was your heart never filled with joy when the snow fell? Did you never waken in the morning and stretch forth your arms with thankfulness that life had been granted to you? Did your heart never leap with delight when the birds flew back in the spring?"

"A long time ago."

"A long time ago, yes. But that time has come back to you. God has freed you from a man who never loved you, and he has given you back His world, which will always be yours, and will always return the love you give to it. Did I ever tell you about St. Teresa?"

"No."

"She did not spend her life forgetting the love of God in coveting earthly things. She wanted only to give herself to the Blessed Jesus. One day when she knelt before the image of our Lord, all desire for things in this world died in her. She had a cross covered with beautiful stones, and a mysterious hand snatched it away. An angel came and struck into her heart a knife tipped with fire."

Tchata laughed bitterly. "So that is what it means to love God! To have your feelings die, to have your trinkets taken away, to have somebody stick you in the side."

Father DeSmet went on as if he had not heard. "When she died the angels took her in their arms and carried her to Heaven and crowned her with roses."

"They gave her a crown of roses because she did not have a man! I would rather be a beaver and have a beaver to live with."

"The love that she received in Heaven, Tchata, was better than any love on earth."

"You mean she had a man there?"

"She had God's love, which is better than the love of any man."

"I do not understand," Tchata said dully.

"Let us go to the chapel," Father DeSmet said, "and pray."

Let us pray, Tchata, that God will help you to understand this love."

As they walked across the hard, sparkling surface of the snow toward the church, the first stars of evening twinkled in the dark blue sky. Tchata breathed deeply of the clean, cold air. When they had reached the door, she paused and put her hand on the priest's arm. "It is true," she said in a kinder tone than Father DeSmet had ever heard her use, "he will not beat me now."

### III

#### The Mountains Didn't Make You Thin, Mon Père

1842

#### I

For scarcely a week were the shad bushes bare. Between the last snowfall and their flowering a bird could not fly over the mountains. From beneath one of them a snowshoe rabbit bounded and stopped, wide-eyed, his white leggings above the bright, new grass. He sniffed the fragrance that drifted from a patch of phlox. Then, tail and heels above his head, he flopped over the cup of a pasque flower and disappeared in the shrubs again. Father DeSmet, watching him, laughed merrily, so that the blind boy who clung to his hand looked up.

"Nooksak, shall I tell you another story about the good St. Francis?"

"Yes, Father," the child replied eagerly, "about a battle and scalps!"

"No, this is a different kind of story." They were walking down the valley in early morning. The air nipped their cheeks. As sharp as a day in autumn it was, but as if to leave no doubt of spring, under the pale-green aspens the hills burned blue with lungwort. "On a day just like this," the priest began, "the good St. Francis and two friends were going down a road. They came to a tree filled with birds, so many they outnumbered the leaves. St. Francis saw them and said to his friends, 'Wait for me here. I will go to preach to my little sisters, the birds.' And he went into the field and began to preach. Immediately they flew down to him, and remained on the ground motionless and quiet until he had finished. Then they all opened their beaks and spread their wings and bent their heads to the ground. And when St.

Francis made the cross over them they divided into four parts, and one part flew toward the east, and another toward the west, and another toward the south, and the fourth part toward the north."

Nooksak had stopped to shake a pebble from one of his moccasins. "Father," he asked, "when I have gone to Heaven and Jesus lets me see again, will there be birds?"

"Yes, Nooksak. I think all the birds that lived on earth will be in Heaven singing for the angels. But even here you have seen more than many boys with good eyes."

"How?" the child asked.

"Have you not seen God?"

"I think so, but not with my eyes—only with a pain right here," and he touched his breastbone. "Father, I smell people. We are almost there."

They were approaching the brown field which Brother Claessens and Brother Specht had prepared for seed. Some of the Indians sat perched upon a rail fence built to keep dogs away from the plowed land. Others were leaning against it. Old Simon had managed to climb into the seat of the bull plow. His proud face, with the skin folded over the bones like rocks ribbed by wind, towered above the others. Father DeSmet thought that he looked like Moses gazing upon the Promised Land. In the center of the field Brother Specht was solemnly casting seed from a bag slung over his left shoulder. Light at the hem from dust, his long, black robe curled up at his feet, as the robes of saints in village churches do.

The great crucifix under Father DeSmet's belt glittered in the sun. His hair had grown almost to his shoulders, and already graying, it gave him added pallor.

Walking Bear came to meet him. "Father, first you cut up the grassland that feeds our horses. Now you throw away the grain that would make us bread."

Insula turned sharply. "Do you find fault with the Father? It is a great medicine. We do not understand."

"You have seen grass die, have you not?" the priest said



quietly. "And you have eaten the seeds. But this time we are burying them in the earth. New grass will grow out of them and you will gather many times as much as we are throwing away." Then he called out, "Brother Specht, bring me a handful of oats."

Brother Specht seemed to cover the field with half a dozen long, quick strides. "I am leaving the north end for potatoes," he said. "We must plow deeper for them."

Father DeSmet reached into the sack and brought out a handful of oats. From the palm of his hand he picked up a single grain. "From this one seed a whole new plant will come. Look at it, Walking Bear."

The Indian took the seed, laughing. "Grass from this! If we bury a stone in the earth no mountain comes out."

"A stone is dead, but there is life here. Just as the grass died, so shall each of us die; and just as we have gathered the seed and a new plant will come from it, so God will gather our souls and new life be born to us in Heaven."

"Is a soul as small as a seed?" Mina-Yougha asked. She was wearing a cape cut from the skin of a mountain goat. One bare arm lay against the fur, and when she moved, her white bone bracelets rattled softly.

"But some things die and never come to life," Walking Bear protested.

Father DeSmet sprinkled the oats on the ground. "No, nothing ever dies. Summer goes to sleep under the snow and comes back in spring. Nothing ever dies except bodies of things. Look at your hand, Walking Bear. Is that you?"

The Flathead held out his hand. "No, Father. It is my hand."

"And your foot, is that you?"

"No. If my foot were cut off, I would still be here."

"Then, Walking Bear, where are you? In your shoulders? In your stomach? In your head?"

The Flathead stared at his moccasins. "Father, I think that I am another man inside myself."

"And that other man within you is your soul. Like a bird

that shatters the shell, when you die the soul will shatter your body and live. And the grass in this seed will shatter the husk and grow into another plant."

Looking into their faces, Father DeSmet saw that they believed. It seemed to him that only men in the freshness of innocence could have faces like theirs. During the long winter months, shut inside their foul-smelling earth lodges, the Flat-heads had moved heavily, as somnolent as grubs on the underside of leaves. Now they had come forth metamorphosed into butterflies. They had bathed in the river and their faces, no longer sallow, seemed to take on the golden tint of the sun. As he looked at them, the priest felt more than ever before that his dream was to be realized. Here at last was the nucleus of a new nation whose only sovereign was God, whose only laws were the laws of the blessed Mother Church, whose only flag was the blue banner of the Holy Virgin.

"I am going away," he said abruptly, "tomorrow morning."

"You come back soon?" Insula asked earnestly.

"Before frost. I will bring things for winter. Father Mengarini and Father Point will stay here."

"Father, I go with you." Nooksak held to the priest's robes with tight fingers. "My feet are like eyes in the hills. I am a mountain goat."

"No, Nooksak, you must stay here with the others."

"You will need a guide. At daybreak I wait for you," Pilchimo said.

Immediately Francis Xavier came forth. "You need two guides."

"Pilchimo and Francis Xavier. That is fine. Two will be enough."

## 2

After midnight the Jesuits lit a candle and spread out their improvised map. Father DeSmet drew a circle near Clark's Fork of the Columbia River, where the Kalispels were said to be wintering still on Horse Prairie.

"Pilchimo says it is almost impossible to get to them because of the canyons," Father Point said.

"You can see it is not far from the Coeur d'Alenes," Father DeSmet answered, as he drew a second circle northwest of the Bitter Root Mountains. "Ignace taught them the prayers last year, and I have promised to come."

A gust of wind whirled through the doorway, the candle flame flickered, and a drop of melted tallow fell onto the map. Father Mengarini wiped it up with his finger. "If the Coeur d'Alenes could send a man here in the dead of winter, Father Pierre can get through now."

On the far side of the Blue Mountains DeSmet added a third circle. "That is the country of the Chinook winds. The snow will be gone there early."

"Are the Nez Percés so far away?" Point asked.

"That's not so far, Father Nicholas. They are the richest people in the Northwest, fifteen hundred horses to a single family. Yet they are begging for a priest."

The imaginations of the men pranced like colts.

"In three years," Mengarini suggested, "Paraguay will be here."

Father DeSmet's pencil was moving farther to the northwest, through Fort Colville and toward Fort Vancouver. "It may take much longer, but with God's help it can be done."

"You may not be very welcome at Vancouver," Point said. "Those Britishers hate the Americans, and I don't think they have too much love for Catholics."

"We shall see," DeSmet said. "At least Father Blanchet is near there. They must tolerate him. Besides, they will know that I haven't come to argue over the boundary dispute."

A shadow fell across the men's faces at the thought of the boundary disagreement. Although they were confident that this mountain country would never be penetrated by a white civilization, they knew that some day it would be subject to either the British or the United States flag.

Father DeSmet seemed to read the other men's thoughts, for he said, "We must always remember that we are Americans and be thankful for it. For that very reason our work will succeed. In Paraguay, under the despotism of Spain, the fathers

had no chance. Sometimes when I lie in bed at night I think of them. Ah, Father Nicholas, I wonder if in the same situation we would be as courageous as they. A hundred thousand Guaranis ready to fight the Spanish troops! Why, they could have massacred them in twenty-four hours. But those priests were brave enough to forbid it, brave enough to say, in the hardest moment of their lives, 'God's will be done.'"

"Brave enough to rot in the dungeons of Buenos Aires," Father Point added.

"May the Lord make us worthy of continuing their work," DeSmet said in a low voice, without lifting his face from the map.

## 3

By sunrise the next day pack horses and mules were waiting. As carelessly as if he were going for an hour's hunt, Father DeSmet rode into the hills with Pilchimo and Francis Xavier.

"Snow stays in the canyon beds until the green flies come," Pilchimo remarked.

"Father, is it a long way we go?" Francis Xavier asked. "Maybe I can buy a woman from another tribe, one like Mina-Yougha, as strong as a cow moose, but with a body like . . ."

"To Fort Vancouver," the priest interrupted him.

After the first day, wherever the canyon walls were toward the south the horses stumbled knee-deep in snow; but in open valleys and on hills their hoofs trod down the crimson, gold-tongued columbines. Sometimes a little flock of cedar waxwings would wheel over their heads and plunge swiftly downward, alighting with shy grace on a leafless branch. Once they passed a lake where hundreds of white pelicans stood with their mouths open, panting like dogs after a chase, their pouches shaking at every breath. And once, far up above the treeline, upon a bare, precipitous peak, Father DeSmet saw a mountain goat. On the topmost ridge it stopped to stare at them, leaning its long chin over the edge of a boulder.

The priest's light-hearted exuberance seemed to diminish the difficulty of those canyons which Pilchimo had described as well-nigh impassable. After the long, hard winter, April sang in his



blood, intoxicating him with dreams until he could see long lines of pack mules trailing over the hills, Indians laboring in the fields, saw-mills, flour-mills, and everywhere over the tops of the trees, steeples with gold crosses on them. He began to wonder how all this could be brought about by three priests and three lay brothers. No, he would have to return to St. Louis and get more workers. But would the Father General understand?

Because life itself was a series of beautiful miracles, Father DeSmet was not surprised to discover, as they rode one day into the camp of the Kalispels, that the Indians were at their prayers. No image of the Holy Virgin lowered her head in benediction above them; but they had nailed a wooden cross to a tree. It had been made that very day from a piece of split pine on which one of the squaws had cut open a trout. So quiet were the Indians in their devotions that, attracted by the smell of fish, a flock of migratory butterflies had clustered over the cross, transforming it into an iridescent blue flame. The opening and closing of their wings, the slight pivoting of their bodies as they sucked the trout juice made the cross change and come alive in the same deceptive manner as the rose windows of French cathedrals when the sunlight pierces them.

As soon as Initzu, the Kalispel chief, saw the huge, black figure of the priest mounted upon his mule, he stood up and shouted. The Indians cried out for joy. And the butterflies flew away.

Inside one of the lodges Father DeSmet smoked the calumet with the chief. Initzu was hard-skinned as a lizard. He had plastered his hair back from his face with little balls of pitch and had smeared his body with bear grease so that the tepee was redolent with a bad odor.

"Father," the Indian said. "We wish to do as you do. But you leave tomorrow, and there is no one to teach us the prayers."

"Do you want to learn all the prayers?" Father DeSmet asked in amazement.

"Yes, Father. We want to talk to the Great Spirit every day."

"There must be some way," the priest thought to himself. Then an idea occurred to him. "Bring me all the children in the tribe," he said to the chief. "Have them form a line outside. You will have the prayers within an hour."

A long line of ragamuffins the children made, their tangled hair and their thin bodies so infested with fleas that they continually scratched themselves, or picked the lice from one another's heads.

Father DeSmet took the first child by the hand. "What is your name?"

"Ameecha."

Then he taught her the words, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." And to the second he taught, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." And to the third, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." Seven of the boys each memorized a part of the *Paternoster*, and twelve the Apostles' Creed. When this was done he placed them in the form of a triangle and bade them repeat their parts over and over again.

"Now everyone will know the prayers," he said, reflecting that here indeed the Scriptures were fulfilled that "a little child shall lead them." Then he blessed the children in his own French, saying aloud, "Almighty God, I have made a rosary of living beads with these children. Accept this gift, offered through love of Thee. Amen."

Meanwhile Ameecha had discovered a very large louse in her hair. Quite unmindful of the prayers, she showed it eagerly to her companion. The two children examined it, talking aloud. Finally, as if to conclude an argument, Ameecha ate the louse, repeating as she did so the lines just learned, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee."

Looking up, Father DeSmet saw them. "No matter," he philosophized, "it is a small fault to eat a louse—not even a peccadillo. God will be nonetheless grateful for this rosary."

When on the following day they rode among flowering elderberry bushes and under the tall pine forests that lead to

Lake Coeur d'Alene, Francis Xavier dug his heels into the side of his mule vehemently. The animal lunged forward just enough to rub its nose along the smooth flank of Father DeSmet's mount.

"Not one horse would I pay for a Kalispel squaw," Francis ejaculated. "Not one buffalo robe. Not the price of three bone beads."

"*Mon Dieu!*" the priest whistled under his breath. "What a low price you put upon women."

"On all but Mina-Yougha," Francis Xavier replied.

After visiting the Coeur d'Alenes the three men rode over a light, sandy soil and through forests of gum pines to Fort Colville where they took a skiff down the Columbia River. Archibald MacDonald, the fur trader, provided them with Canadian *voyageurs*, for neither Francis nor Pilchimo were boatmen.

Day after day the Flatheads lay stretched full length on the barge, in perfect comfort under their blankets, listening to the gay songs of the Creole *voyageurs*.

*Dans mon chemin j'ai rencontré  
Trois cavalieres bien montées,  
L'on, ton laridon danée,  
L'on, ton laridon dai . . .*

They first heard the Columbia cascades like a rustle of wind among willows. Then the sound swelled to an ear-splitting roar and the Canadians stopped singing.

"Row! Row! *Vous êtes des imbéciles!*" the pilot yelled. He was standing up, his legs spread wide apart. The wind whirled his capot back from his body so that his striped cotton shirt and cloth trousers gave a gay color to the somber land.

Underneath the skiff, the water, churned to a white foam, tumbled against rocks, fell back, and swirled in wild eddies. Father DeSmet was jerked forward. The barge halted, half spun.

"Row! Row! *Jésus!*" the pilot yelled.

All at once they plunged forward. Rocks and water rushed under them, and a moment later they glided upon the broad surface of a placid river. The *voyageurs* began singing again in

the odd patois of men who have long ago forgotten the correct inflections of their native tongue.

*Trois cavalieres bien montées,  
L'une à cheval, l'autre à pie,  
L'on, ton laridon danée,  
L'on, ton laridon dai.*

On the right a continuous mountain range shot almost perpendicularly into the air—black, shining, and shrubless. To the left, deep columns of basalt here and there gave way to clay bluffs where a few horses wandered from one wisp of dwarfed bunch-grass to another. Then the grass dwindled and hummocks of bare sand fringed the river's edge. A strong west wind drove sand into the men's faces.

"Walla Wallas, *mon père*," the pilot said, pointing to a group of Indians standing on scaffolds built over the river. They were fishing for salmon with scoop nets and bone spears. "They own the horses we passed. Rich men they are."

For five days the *voyageurs* sang lustily as they rowed down the river through a country as bleak as the banks of the northern Nile. Then once more the air was pungent with fragrant greasewood, and beyond the greasewood red laurel and stunted oaks and pines sprawled across sterile buttes. Now and then a plover rose over the water or a crowd of sea otters plunged from the rocks.

"We'll have rain before the Dalles," the Canadian said. "The people in western Oregon have wet feet nine months a year, and the other three it's foggy."

"The Dalles?" Father DeSmet asked.

"The worst place on the river, *mon père*. They were once waterfalls, but the current cut channels through the rock. When the water is low it all passes down the channels, but at this time of year it goes over the stones. *Sacré Dieu!* It is as if all the lashing and leaping and whirling of Hell were under you. It is a bad place."

Father DeSmet felt troubled. "It is ridiculous," he told himself. "I am fatigued." He took off his wide-brimmed hat and



placed it over his right hand. Underneath it he began telling his beads. But the uneasiness did not disappear. With each *Ave Maria* it increased a little, and before he had finished the third decade a sharp fear thumped against his throat. "I am a coward," he thought. "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*"

"I've been over the Dalles some twenty times, *mon père*," the pilot was saying in a voice that indicated the priest's face betrayed his thoughts.

Francis Xavier turned to the Canadian. "You go over without danger. But I lost a friend there, a Nez Percé."

"The Nez Percés are poor pilots," the Canadian answered.

"Tell me when we are near the Dalles," the priest said suddenly. "I shall go by land." The words came against his will. He had not wanted to say that.

"You go by land!" the pilot exclaimed. "You who have crossed the mountains in bad seasons! I know the way into the Bitter Roots from Fort Laramie. Forgive me, *mon père*, but you need not fear the Dalles. We can handle the barge as easily as you handle your mule. It is hard to crawl over the rocks. There are loose stones that give way under your feet."

"Francis and Pilchimo will take me over," DeSmet said. Having finished the rosary he put his hat on again. "*Mon fils*, I cannot tell why this is, but I must go by land."

Two hours later Father DeSmet and the Flatheads were clambering over fragments of rock that threatened to slide under their feet and cast them into a raging torrent below. They stood for a moment to observe the barge as it pushed into the river again. The men handled the oars with such ease and confidence that the priest regretted his misgivings. The pilot, standing with his hands on his hips, his capot flung over one arm, made a fine picture—like a young French king. Suddenly the boat stopped so abruptly that the rowers lunged forward. Once again with redoubled vigor they bent over the sweeps. Father DeSmet made the sign of the cross as he watched. He could hear the pilot shouting, "*Tenez les rames! Tirez donc! Mon Dieu!*" Suddenly the barge spun like a top over the whirling waters; the oars were buffeted helplessly by the force of the current. The bow sprang

into the air; the stern disappeared. A death-like chill shot through the priest's body. He was dizzy, a dimness came over his eyes, but his ears heard with horror the desperate shriek of "*C'est la fin!*" and after that only the sound of rushing water. The three men continued to stare at the foaming river. They were unable to move. Finally everywhere oars, poles, provisions, and barge were scattered over the surface of the water. Separated here and there, the unhappy men appeared struggling in the churning foam. One *voyageur* was tossed upon the bank. A half-breed clinging to a piece of floating wood managed to keep above water. And the pilot who had been so confident clung to the handle of an empty trunk and reached land.

Sick at heart the remaining men rowed down the lower Columbia. The river was shadowed by huge pine forests, their branches hung with gray moss, their boles spotted with mustard-colored fungi. Waterfalls roared over the cliffs and a wind whirled their white mists above the trees. Where the forest was not too thick, wine-lipped, blue pentstemons stood proud and happy. But day after day the rain fell, a fine drizzle, dripping from fir needles, sliding over the moss, down the mountainsides. Rocks glistened with rain and the air reeked with a smell of wet earth and living roots. The men wrapped heavy cloaks about them, but the rain soaked them to the skin. Over and over Father DeSmet whispered prayers for the dead.

## 4

On a bright June day Father DeSmet and his companions walked up the one street of the village of Vancouver toward the fort. Clusters of ragged, half-breed children tumbled out of their way. Chickens flapping their wings scurried across the road. One by one villagers appeared at doorways and windows to stare at the strangers. In front of a whitewashed bungalow with a low, slanting roof, Francis Xavier stopped. Father DeSmet waited for him a moment. The Indian was gazing toward the cottage as if hypnotized. An Hawaiian woman, leaning against the doorway, returned his gaze. The black *holoku* she wore accentuated her narrow hips and small, sharp breasts. She held

a yellow calabash in one hand and with the other stroked the black hair away from her pointed olive face.

"Francis Xavier, are you coming with us?" the priest asked.

"Yes." The Indian still kept his eyes on the Hawaiian woman.

"If you walk backwards, my friend, you will trip on your heels." Father DeSmet slapped him on the back and pushed him along.

News of the arrival of strangers moved quickly from cabin to cabin, from the grain store to the bakery, from the bakery to the ax-house. Abbé François Blanchet, appointed Vicar General of Oregon by the Bishop of Quebec, was chatting with Andrew Sovik. Sovik had come from the Orkney Islands to join a Pacific whaling fleet, and a shark had taken one of his legs the year before. The Indian who brought them news of the barge's arrival added as an afterthought, "A priest is with them." The vicar general at once took his leave.

"It must be Pierre Jean DeSmet," he thought. "He has been a long time in the mountains. He will go directly to the chapel."

The vicar was not mistaken. In the church he found a priest kneeling in prayer—a man with herculean shoulders and shaggy, uncut hair. The vicar waited by the confessional. Finally Father DeSmet crossed himself, rose, made his genuflexion before the altar, and turned around. As soon as he saw the vicar general he ran to him, fell upon his knees, and implored his blessing. But at precisely the same moment Abbé Blanchet had also knelt to ask a blessing from the Jesuit. The two men embraced with tears in their eyes.

"*Dieu merci! Grâce au ciel!*" Father DeSmet murmured.

"Dr. McLoughlin is expecting you," Blanchet said.

"I have heard a great deal about this fur trader," the Jesuit remarked when they were at the doorway.

"Fur trader, Father! Dr. McLoughlin is no fur trader." Blanchet leaned close to his companion and lowered his voice. "He is a king, and this is his empire, as big a kingdom as the British Isles. You will like him nonetheless for his autocracy. He is a sophisticated gentleman who believes a man should be as fond of his books as of his guns."

"Has he succeeded in making scholars of his half-breeds?" DeSmet asked, laughing.

"Not yet, but he may."

Walking up the street toward the stockade, DeSmet noticed that now the whole village had come out to watch them pass.

"The political situation is somewhat tense here," Blanchet was saying. "Although Americans are treated with civility, they are not loved."

"As an American, Father Blanchet, I should like to see our flag in Oregon. As a Catholic priest, I should like to see the influence of Hudson's Bay Company continue."

Father Blanchet nodded. "I am not surprised, from what I have heard of the American Fur Company."

As they approached the palisade a porter fitted his ponderous key into the brass padlock and opened the thick, double-ribbed gates. At that moment Father DeSmet heard a scuffle of hoofs and caught sight of a tall, white-haired man on a chestnut horse just as he disappeared behind an imposing, white frame house.

"That is the doctor," Father Blanchet explained. "He prefers to ignore your arrival now in order that he may receive you formally in his parlor."

The house which they faced stood immediately behind the gate of the palisade. It was a pretentious, two-story structure of heavy timber, mortised in the Canadian fashion. A bed of red geraniums flanked the broad piazza, and grapevines trailed over a rude trellis at the side. A flight of steps in the form of a horse-shoe led to the door, and upon a halfway landing stood a twenty-four-pound cannon, mounted on a ship's carriage. On either side of this were two mortar guns with shot piled neatly about them. Above, higher than the background of snow-capped mountains, rippled the British flag.

"So this is the king's palace!" Father DeSmet said with admiration.

"Yes, to us who live here, Father. To Hudson's Bay Company it is the governor's residence."

An Indian boy, soft-footed as a panther, admitted the men and left them waiting in a large, comfortably furnished drawing-



room. A piano, a bowl of pink roses, a case of leather-bound books might have made the missionary feel that he had indeed returned to civilization, had he not been startled by the sudden appearance of the white-haired gentleman who a few minutes before had so mysteriously rushed out of sight on his horse. He entered the room hastily. Father DeSmet was shocked by his enormous size, by his deep-socketed, fierce eyes, and by his wild, white hair. But in a moment the light from an east window fell across the doctor's face, and the missionary could detect the small, affable, almost jocular lines about his mouth.

Lunch was served in an adjoining room. After the coffee, McLoughlin pushed his chair from the table. "The stable boy has saddled horses. If you are not too tired, perhaps you would like to see the establishment. We will ride down to the ax-house first. I have an errand there."

When Dr. John McLoughlin and the two priests appeared in the doorway of the long, log building known as the ax-house, the workmen struck their anvils more vigorously and kept their eyes riveted upon the irons, watching them change from low to bright red, and then to the white heat necessary for hammering. Only the smith nearest the door lifted his flushed, bearded face and said, "Good morning, Governor."

"We must make fifty axes a day to keep the trappers and Indians supplied," the governor explained to the priest.

DeSmet was not surprised at the silence of the workmen. Six feet seven inches tall, wrapped in a dark blue cape, his white hair flowing over his shoulders, his steel blue eyes as sharp as those of an angry osprey, the Governor of Hudson's Bay Company west of the Rocky Mountains was a man to command respect and fear.

"Isn't Jorge here today?" he asked, shouting to be heard over the clang of hammers.

The red-faced man, who had been striking blows alternately with a helper, laid down his hammer. "No, Doctor. His son came this morning to say the pain is worse."

McLoughlin walked down the line of forges to an open door, through which Father DeSmet could see two men at work

making helves. The roof of the building was low, the windows widely separated; and the light of the forges glowed upon the naked chests of the men. Sweat dripped down their cheeks and shoulders.

"One word to you all before I go," McLoughlin shouted. Instantly the ring of hammers ceased. The men looked up. "McCaffrey tells me Jorge is worse. If there is ever another fight in the ax-house, you will each pay heavily for it. It takes strong muscles for this kind of work, but I can't use beasts. Remember that you are part of Hudson's Bay Company, that we fly the British flag, and that we live like men."

When this speech had been delivered, the doctor strode past the forges again and disappeared through the doorway. By the time the priests had followed him out, he was already mounted on his horse and ready to go.

Beyond the village the men rode between orderly rows of vegetables, raspberry bushes, grapevines, into a field of purple asters where the yellow bees hovered in air like motes of living sunlight.

"The peach trees are well started," McLoughlin commented as he dismounted to open a gate. "When the *Owghee* stopped here in twenty-nine, bringing enough diseases to wipe out half the natives, Captain Dominis also brought some sprouts which he'd picked up in Juan Fernandez. They've done well. Everything does well in Oregon."

The trees were in fact heavily laden. Father DeSmet examined the small, green knobs along their branches. "I shall want to start an orchard for the Flatheads, Dr. McLoughlin. Perhaps your gardener can tell me something about spraying."

"There's nothing Bruce would rather do. I tell him it's not the care they get, but the climate." The men were standing ankle deep in grass and orange ramsted. "Look at that grass," McLoughlin added. "Even that is lush. But you can't convince Bruce."

Beyond the peach trees they crossed an apple orchard, on the other side of which lay the seven-hundred-acre farm of Hudson's Bay Company, the corn swaying in the breeze, almost knee-

high, the oats already yellow. To the right, over a gentle rise of land, grazed cattle and sheep.

"Where did you get your cattle?" Father DeSmet asked.

"We drove them up from California, but most of the original herd was poisoned on water hemlock and died. We had to build up from the few that were left. That's a pretty good herd, isn't it?" The doctor smiled.

As they rode back Father DeSmet could see beyond the gardens to the trim, well-kept lawns of the governor's residence, down the hill to straight, neat rows of cabins, and still farther to the blue Columbia where the gulls were flecks of white circling in air. Everything was tidy, prosperous, and gay.

"Ah," he said, "if I could only bring my brothers in St. Louis out here! Then perhaps they would understand."

Blanchet and McLoughlin were both surprised. "Understand, *mon père?*"

"This is exactly what I want to do for my Indians. A dozen establishments like this, with gardens, orchards, a farm, and workshops, and in the center of each a Catholic church and a parish priest. You, Doctor, have proven that with money and organization it can be done. I beg of you, Father Blanchet, to pray for us and for our mission. We are much in need of funds and priests."

At the governor's residence the stable boy took their horses.

"You and Father Blanchet will both dine with me tonight," the doctor said. "I eat with the clerks in the mess hall. You understand, we have a somewhat peculiar custom—the men take their meals together. As a missionary among the Indians, I am sure you will appreciate the reason. There is not yet a white woman in Vancouver. The squaws eat on the floor and use their fingers. They are fine women, but I wish to maintain a civilized community. I want my men to keep their English manners. Good afternoon." He pushed open a door at the side of the house, and the two men were suddenly left alone.

Father Blanchet took DeSmet's arm. "Dr. McLoughlin is a remarkable man, a great man. Did you know that two months ago he became a Catholic?"

That evening after dinner, the governor took the priests to his office. There he unrolled a map. "You see what we have done," he said eagerly, gesticulating with a pencil. "We have leased all this land along the Stikine River from the Russians. I sent my son-in-law up there. It's a cold, desolate country, but Eloisa, my oldest girl, is an Ojibway. She's an odd mixture of woman and iron. It will do her no harm."

Father DeSmet looked at the Stikine Valley. Far enough north it was to cause no protest from the Americans. His glance slid southward to Puget Sound. "The rumor in the States, Doctor, is that the English have granted the Puget Sound country to the Russians."

"All lies!" McLoughlin scoffed. "Lies, lies! We can give no land away until the boundaries are set. And as for the accusations that we are shipping out lumber and produce—yes, I know all about them. But what are your Americans south of the Columbia doing? Just that!" He tapped the priest's shoulder with his pencil. "The trouble with your American friends, Father DeSmet, is that they have no patience. As soon as they see a piece of arable land, they want to grab it. They are frantic. They begin crying for fortifications and military forces. They put their faith in action—any kind of action—but they lack strategy."

"How soon do you think the boundary will be settled?" DeSmet asked.

"It will have to be settled within a few years. Once a canal is opened through the Isthmus of Darien, your citizens will migrate like flocks of geese. We shall have to have an agreement before then."

Father DeSmet was scrutinizing the crinkled lines that denoted the western mountains. "I believe—I am quite certain, Doctor, that even after the west coast is well populated, there will be no white settlements between the Rockies and the Coast Range."

"Yes. You are right about that," Blanchet put in.

McLoughlin raised his eyebrows. "You gentlemen forget that the New World is a land of miracles. In the past the most outlandish prophecies have come true."

"But in the oldest countries of Europe and Asia there are



still great pockets of wilderness," DeSmet protested. "There are no roads through the forests of Central Russia, no cities in the heart of India."

McLoughlin folded his map. "There are dead countries, Father DeSmet, and living countries. There are countries where men suffer for a crust of bread and countries where they kill one another for gold. We are living in the latter kind."

Father DeSmet had turned away and was examining a puma skin which hung on the wall. "A fine skin, Monsieur."

"We ship them to Paris by way of China."

The priest passed his hand caressingly over the pelt. "Sometimes I indulge in fancies," he said softly. "It seems odd to me that so often there is a marked disparity between a country and the people who inhabit it. The French people, for instance, are so much better than the land they live on. In America the land is so much better than the people."

"By the way," McLoughlin said, "one of your men has been after a woman here."

Father DeSmet frowned. "Francis Xavier! Surely you misunderstand. He is a good Christian, but he wants to buy a squaw."

"Of course, Father. I did not mean to imply anything else."

"Isn't she free?" the priest asked.

"She's not an Indian. That's why I brought the matter up. She's a girl from the Sandwich Islands. These Hawaiians practice infanticide; they have no conception of fidelity. The women will not do a squaw's work."

"I will talk to Francis Xavier tonight. Thank you for telling me, Doctor."

"There will have to be some kind of ecclesiastic organization for the Oregon territory," the vicar said suddenly, as if he had been inattentive to the conversation.

Father DeSmet turned around. "I believe, Father Blanchet, that is a matter which rests in the hands of your bishop at Quebec."

"The erection of a diocese would hardly seem advisable with so scanty a population," Father Blanchet replied. "The Bishop of

Quebec is concerned with the salvation of the French Canadians. The Society of Jesus is better fitted to handle this problem."

"I wish it were true, Father Blanchet. But as you see, we have been able to bring only three priests and three lay brothers to the mountains. And to send them I had to go to New Orleans, Boston, and New York and beg for money."

Father Blanchet leaned across McLoughlin's desk. "If you could open a Jesuit residence in the Willamette Valley to serve as a base of supplies and as headquarters for all the missions you plan to establish in the mountains, you would have the nucleus of the little Catholic nation you wish to create."

DeSmet began pacing the floor thoughtfully. "Yes, that is true. That is very true; but it is like buying a sloop with three pennies in your hand."

"It is not a question of what should be done, but what must be done, Father DeSmet," McLoughlin put in. "In the Bitter Roots you are away from the settlements. You do not see the Protestant activity here. Even if such work among the natives does not bear immediate fruit, it endangers the chances of Catholicism. The Indians become confused and in the end recusant. They are offered a Baptist God, a Presbyterian God, a Methodist God, and a Catholic God. Each man tells them he alone can save their souls. It is pitiful. One man dips their children in the river, the next puts salt on their tongues, and the third sprinkles water on their heads."

"Have you ever noticed, Father DeSmet," Blanchet said, putting his fingers together thoughtfully, "that it is always the converts who worry about the Protestants. But in a way the doctor is right. If you cannot get funds in America, would it be possible to get them in Europe? I understand that you are well known in Belgium. I have thought—ah, that too is a dream—but with God's help—I have thought a little group of nuns to start a convent, a few Sisters of Loretto for instance to care for orphans and the diseased. And if you think best, I will work for a bishopric here."

"Why, you both understand," Father DeSmet said in amazement. "Then you don't think it's a dream, do you?"

"No," Father Blanchet said. "It can be done."

"I will think this over," the Jesuit said eagerly. "Maybe I shall go to Belgium for help, but it is a long time to be away from the Indians."

Some days later the missionary and the Flatheads were walking down the village street toward the river. Far off they could see the Canadians loading their barge for the trip home.

"It will be good to get back," Father DeSmet said. "They will be digging potatoes."

"Father, this is a poor land. There are too many people all different in one place." Pilchimo shrugged his shoulders as he spoke as if glad to be relieved of the burden of Fort Vancouver.

Francis Xavier walked in silence.

All at once a woman came toward the three men. She was wearing a black *holoku* and swinging a calabash in her hand. When they were quite close she stopped in such a way as to block the men's path. Then, leaning against Francis Xavier so that her shoulder rubbed his arm, she murmured in a soft French patois that had more scorn than hate in it, "In my country we think a man who sleeps alone is a fool. When one reaches manhood and still lives like a child, he is—what shall we say?—*un imbécile!*" As she uttered the last word she flipped a slender, brown hand across the Indian's face; then, sliding her narrow shoulders between the men, she was gone.

They continued their way. When they were almost down to the barge, Francis Xavier said, "There is a girl at home with a cleft lip. She is not beautiful, Father, but she is a good woman. She will work. She will obey me better than my horse. Father, will you marry us?"

## 5

After returning from Fort Vancouver Father DeSmet stayed with the Flatheads only two weeks. He had decided to accept Father Blanchet's advice. He would go to St. Louis, and if necessary to Europe. Consequently, at the end of August, accompanied by ten Flatheads, he left the Bitter Root Valley once more and crossed the Rocky Mountains, riding eastward toward the Yellowstone River.

Descending the east slope of the mountains, the travelers threaded their way among hills, bare and treeless, spotted with sage and thistles. At noon a desiccated wind whipped against their horses. At night ominous black clouds rolled over the distant peaks, blotting them out and threatening rain. But always later sharp white stars appeared to bleach the sage and withered buffalo grass. Fearing the Blackfeet, the men often hid in the thickets by day and continued their journey under cover of night. At last they reached the country of the Missouri River and Fort Union.

The American Fur Company post stood six miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. Above its cottonwood pickets and stone bastions thirty feet high, fluttered the American flag. Outside the palisade drunken Assiniboina amused themselves at gambling games, seated almost under the foul-smelling scaffolds of their dead. Father DeSmet thought that their broad, flat faces seemed singularly stupid by contrast with the sensitive features of the Flatheads. Everything about them reminded him of the Potawatomi: the remains of many dinners that lay scattered over the ground, the confusion, the filth, and the Indians' blood-shot eyes betraying an excessive indulgence in liquor. "Well, we are in the United States again," he thought grimly.

Kenneth McKenzie, representative of the American Fur Company in the upper Missouri country, welcomed the priest heartily. Like McLoughlin, McKenzie also was born to command, but the missionary found his face hard rather than stern. His rough, positive manner of talking savored of insolence and his uniform with its bright brass buttons a little too much of vanity. The two men sat in a commodious, well-furnished room, before a fire of pine logs. The trader filled Father DeSmet's whisky glass twice and his own many times.

"It is a misfortune," the priest ventured to say, "that the Missouri Indians are so susceptible to liquor. I sometimes wonder what will become of them."

"A misfortune!" McKenzie echoed in surprise. "It's a God-damn good thing. Sir, the future of America lies in one of these



little whisky glasses. For us it is the weapon of civilization, the way of winning furs, loyalty, and land."

"Perhaps you are right," DeSmet murmured with distaste.

McKenzie drained his glass. "Let me tell you, sir, everyone must live his own life. I have respect for you and your work. To you good and evil are two different things. But I don't agree with that. I've seen good come out of evil too often, and evil come out of good. A drunken savage may be an evil thing in himself, but in the hands of the American Fur Company he becomes the means to something good. The West can only be civilized by business; it can only be populated by trade. Among the savages liquor is our money. It don't make much difference whether you give a man a glass of whisky or a dollar bill, if he values them the same."

"No doubt, Monsieur, the fur trade is a great factor in the economic development of the West. Yet I wonder if it is a good thing to win prosperity at the expense of human lives."

"Human lives!" McKenzie scoffed. "My friend, did you ever try to make a horse out of a coyote?"

The priest admitted that he had not.

"Well, you can't make a human being out of a savage either."

"Is there any steamboat due shortly?" Father DeSmet asked, glad to change the subject.

"We were expecting the *Omega* two weeks ago. It's late in the season now. I doubt if it will get here. Where are you going?"

"To St. Louis."

"Your best chance is a skiff. It's a long trip, but you can make it before the freeze. Are you quitting this country for good?"

"No, I need more money and men."

"I guess you do. It's tough sledding, trying to make the Indians behave."

A rap on the door interrupted them. An *engagé* entered. "Mr. McKenzie, the hunters—Jim Bradley's party, you know—were attacked by a band of Sioux."

McKenzie stood up. "My God! Any fool that gets in the

way of those devils is no good to our company. How did it happen?"

"We don't know yet."

"Were the horses saved?"

The *engagé* shifted his glance from the trader to Father DeSmet, and from Father DeSmet to the floor. "No, sir. I'm afraid the horses were lost. All the men but one escaped, sir."

"Damn the men!" McKenzie blurted out. "We got too many of them now. It's horses we can't afford to lose."

When the employee had left, the trader poured himself another glass of whisky. "A horse is worth a good many men out here," he said. "They breed faster and we only have to wait three years to use them. The men breed with the native women. We wait fifteen years and get nothing but a yellow cat. I might have known Jim Bradley would get us in a mess."

As soon as possible the priest excused himself.

## 6

The next morning Father DeSmet sent eight of the Flat-heads home again, keeping with him a young man named Gabriel and Francis Xavier. Before sunrise they pushed their skiff into the Missouri River, and within an hour they had passed the last of the Indian villages along the river bank. Only the soft gurgle of water against the paddles and occasionally the high-pitched trill of a lonely curlew broke the stillness. Beyond the willows, yellow as sunflowers, gray buttes streaked with mauve formed a broken wall against deep blue.

On the third day rounded cones of earth appeared, bare and smooth, like soil turned up by burrowing moles. At night the men pitched camp and built their fire in a poplar grove where the ground was red with the hips of roses. On the fourth day elk and antelopes came to the river to drink, and the last gray bears of the mountains prowled along the shore. Already the foothills lay behind them. In every direction extended parched and thirsty plains. On the fifth day Father DeSmet thought that he heard the *chug chug* of an engine. He leaned forward, alert, but again stillness prevailed. He wondered if his imagination had played a

trick on him, or if the wind had shifted. All at once a bullfrog plopped into the river with a splash. Then the priest heard a clear, distant chugging that now continued with an unmistakably familiar rhythm.

"Francis, a steamboat is coming."

Gabriel lifted his paddle. The three men listened. Somewhere a beaver banged its tail against the water, like a clap of thunder, but the chugging continued. Between its fringe of willows the river wound so tortuously that always ahead of the travelers a bend and a tongue of land hindered their view.

"It is a boat!" Francis cried, pointing upstream to the east. Behind them and out in the heart of the plains two columns of smoke, narrow at the horizon, broadened into the sky, not the ghost blue smoke of wood fire, but black and thick.

"In the middle of the desert!" DeSmet exclaimed. "*C'est impossible!*"

"The river winds back," Gabriel said.

So shallow was the water that everywhere sandbanks threatened to ground the skiff. Patiently Gabriel guided it along the labyrinthine coil of the channel, which again and again bent back upon itself. As the boat slid around snags, bars, and sawyers the columns of smoke would vanish and reappear later in a different direction. Sometimes they drew near only to recede again. But the distant puffing of an engine continued to cheer the men. They drew the skiff ashore to let a herd of buffalo cross. Leisurely and without fear the heavy beasts plunged down the bank and into the water, swimming through the deeper parts, lumbering over sandbars, wading through shallows. Gabriel paddled cross-current to avoid a beaver dam. Then they rounded a long, jutting cliff of rock white as alabaster, and found the steamboat coming towards them.

The port side of her hull was as white as a gull's wing, but the starboard was splashed with mud, for three times, as they heard later, the northwest wind had thrown her against an alluvial bank, inundating her lower deck with silt. However, the name *Omega* had not been obliterated from her bow. Battered as she was, her American flag torn to tatters, and a deep scar on her

side where a snag had rammed it, she was singularly beautiful.

Father DeSmet stood up, waving his arms. Behind him his robe blew out like a black sail, his long gray hair like a flag at the masthead. Deck passengers crowded to the rail. All manner of men they were: fur traders, half-breeds, Indians, adventurers, swindlers at cards, and merchants. But as the priest was taken on board, he was aware of only one face in that group—the wide forehead, the young, almost boyish eyes under heavy brows, the black beard of Captain Joseph LaBarge.

"Father DeSmet!" the Frenchman cried. "You are the best cargo we've taken on!"

"And the least profitable, I am sure," the priest answered, his eyes twinkling. "When I saw your boat coming I turned my pockets inside out and only found two pennies."

"We shall put you to scrubbing the decks," the captain laughed, "unless you will say Mass on Sunday." He looked the priest over as a father might examine his son after long absence. "The mountains didn't make you thin, *mon père*. I beg your pardon, but you do look well fed."

"I have been well fed—roast dog, moss cakes, camas roots, a little skunk for special occasions, kinnikinnick for tobacco, and a sour herb for coffee."

As the two men walked off together, the crowd dispersed. The gamblers returned to their cards, the Indians to casting dice where they sat cross-legged on the deck. An English scientist in broadcloth, with field glasses suspended from one shoulder, opened his notebook to jot down the incident of the priest's arrival.

"This is a bad trip," LaBarge confided to DeSmet when they were alone. "The river is too low. Going up, one can do pretty well in avoiding sandbars, but coming down the current will drive us into them."

"McKenzie isn't expecting you. That is why I took a skiff."

"Then McKenzie doesn't know Joe LaBarge. I'd go down the rivers of hell to keep my word. By the way, Cutter is piloting the boat."

"I want to see him," DeSmet said.



"He'll want to see you. He's feeling pretty good. Last spring he married his squaw."

Father DeSmet went to the pilot house. "Cutter, I congratulate you."

"So you've heard already that I got married. Black Dave, here's a man I got to talk to. You take the tiller."

A Negro, six feet tall and with a face made to tell no secrets, stepped forward.

"This is Black Dave," Cutter explained, "one of the best pilots we ever had, but he's new on this run. I tell him some men are born to be great fighters like Napoleon, and some born to be great presidents like Washington, but if ever a man was born to be a great pilot, it's Black Dave." He slapped the Negro on the back, but already at the helm, the latter did not turn around.

"Cutter," Father DeSmet asked, "has everything been going along all right?"

"Everything since last June. God, I'm glad to see you."

"Since last June?"

"If ever a man needed a priest, I needed you coming back from the spring trip."

Father DeSmet was looking at Black Dave. There was something uncanny in his fingers. Although he seemed to touch the helm as lightly as a moth touches a leaf, the steamboat always responded, sometimes with a movement to starboard or port so slight that it could scarcely be felt. Twice he rang the bell signal for the engineers, but his words in the voice-tube were inaudible. The priest turned to Cutter. "Last June? Were you ill?"

"Worse than ill, Father. It was hot, damn hot, and we had a corpse on board. The coolest place to keep the body was up here in the pilot house. I don't know what happened to the corpse, but it took a glass of whisky every thirty minutes to keep me going."

"Have you never sat at a wake, Cutter?" DeSmet asked. "A corpse can't hurt you."

"Well, it got me to thinking, thinking about death and things like that. I've seen a good many men shot down like dogs, but

it was all over within a minute. This was different. I had that corpse rotting behind my back every day. Father, I thought about lots of things that never popped into my head before. I wanted to talk to you, but God knows where you were then. So I went back to St. Louis and married my squaw, just to sort of square things with the Almighty."

"I am glad, Cutter. If a body can do that much good after death, think what a soul can do."

"I don't think the corpse gave a damn. Have you been getting any news up North?"

"Only at Fort Colville and Vancouver."

"Then you didn't hear about the *Pocahontas* and how she sank?"

"No," DeSmet said. "Another boiler explosion?"

"No, nothing like that. You know Jake never took soundings as often as he should. There's a bad crossing beyond Fort Calhoun, and the idiot always marked it by the barking of a dog. He'd done that for three years, and then that fool dog barked from a different place. The boat rammed the sand so hard she went down."

"How many were killed?"

"Only three, two half-breeds and a German who'd come up to draw pictures." Cutter leaned forward and pointed to the surface of the river. "See that line on the water? That means there's a reef underneath. The trouble is sometimes the wind makes exactly the same kind of a line. It's hard to tell. If it's a dimple, there's a rock, and when you see a little boiling hollow you can be sure a reef of sand is shifting downstream. The trip back will be a bad one."

Some days later the boat had unloaded its cargo of whisky, flour, gunpowder, tobacco, and sundry articles at Fort Union and was headed toward St. Louis again. Father DeSmet leaned over the deck rail, watching the muddy water that looked so innocent and was in reality so treacherous. Behind him two men sprawled in deck chairs. One of them, unshaven, heavy, reeking with the mixed smells of whisky and sweat, leaned forward to emphasize his words by shaking a corncob pipe.

"I don't give a Goddam what the fool says he will or won't do. Once we liquor him up good and plenty, he'll sign them papers. That's my job, see? I do the dirty work, and we split on the deal."

The other answered brittlely. "Get him drunk. Make him sign the papers. When he comes to he'll run a knife through your ribs just like he did to Joe Cady. I was there. I saw it. The first thing you got to learn is there ain't no law to protect an honest man."

"Buffalo quarter on starboard bow!" a sentry shouted from the hurricane deck.

Father DeSmet watched the crew lower a boat, which put to shore for the game. Always at midnight, while the steamboat was moored, hunters wandered along the river banks. They fastened their game in a conspicuous place, on the limb of a tree or on the top of a boulder, where the sentry could spot it the following morning. At noon, tired out, covered with blood, they boarded the steamboat again, often with partridges, beavers, and other small kill hanging from their necks.

The priest watched the deck hand draw his skiff onto the bank and dislodge the buffalo meat from the notch of a tree. More than ever he was conscious of the roughness of these Missouri River traders. Good men they were in their way, but narrow at heart. Steadfast in friendship, quick to affection, and quick to anger, yet men without vision, always waging a bitter war for more money in their pockets, a little more whisky in their bellies, or a new squaw in their huts.

Suddenly the boat shuddered. The men in the deck chairs were thrown forward. The mate shouted to the crew, and all the passengers rushed to the rail to investigate so that the prow would have tipped precariously had not the cargo been heavy. The steamboat had struck a bar. Deck hands were running in all directions, and quickly two giant timbers were being lifted over the hull, sunk in the water, and fastened underneath. Everything was bustle, confusion, and excitement.

Father DeSmet heard a voice in his ear. "It's a bad time of

year for goin' down the river. I never seen such bars and snags. It's bad business."

Turning about, he found himself face to face with a short, muscular man, dressed in a fantastic costume of deeply fringed buckskin trousers and a broadcloth coat. A red scar reaching from his lower lip to his ear gave him the appearance of having an enormous, crooked mouth.

"The trouble with gettin' over a sandbar," the man continued, "is that the engine gets too het up. After the boiler of the *Delaware* busted, the captain confessed he'd kept a nigger hangin' on the valve half the day. The skunk!"

"LaBarge is the best man on the river," DeSmet answered. "I think he could float a steamboat on a dewdrop."

"They was all at breakfast when it happened. Three ladies too, and I call that a shame, with women as scarce out here as albino pigs. A man forgets what a ruffled petticoat looks like."

He was leaning on his right arm, and the priest noticed that from the end of his coat sleeve protruded an iron claw.

"You're wonderin' about that hand? Everybody does. Got it ripped off three years ago by a grizzly up in the Yellowstone country. The blacksmith at Fort Leavenworth made this contraption. Works pretty well."

He watched the crew on the sandbar, some of them knee-deep in muddy water. Then he wandered away, but a little later he tapped the priest's shoulder again. "I ain't never talked to a priest before, but, by God, you've got the build of a trapper. When I seen you I says to myself, 'There's a real man, as hale and hearty as the fisherman Peter.'"

"It takes a good deal of brawn to be a missionary, my friend. The work is hard," Father DeSmet said. "I don't think we'll get off this bar tonight."

"I never was much of a lady-killer, but when I got this hand tore off, I says to myself, 'Take it on the chin and it won't matter much.' The trouble with women is they love their heroes only when they come out whole. A horse with splints gets shot, you know."



"That's because a horse's soul is in its legs," Father DeSmet said comfortingly. "It is different with a man."

"Not when he's a trapper," the stranger muttered and walked away.

For two hours the steamboat hung on the sandbar like a beetle clinging to a milkweed pod. In the afternoon a high wind rose, clouds piled up in the west, and before nightfall a driving rain had set in. The *Omega* leaned in the gale at an angle of almost forty-five degrees. The frightened workmen hauled out strong cords which they attached to her side, and tried to pull her upright again by drawing them around the branches of river snags. Then darkness fell and the crew climbed wearily on deck. Father DeSmet crawled into his berth only to discover that he must sleep either in a position half upright or with legs higher than his head.

At noon the next day the stern once more sank into water, the *Omega* moved forward easily, and a shout of joy rose from the passengers. But the engine had been running at full speed and fuel was low. A short distance downstream they put to shore. The mate called out, "Wood up!" and both crew and passengers, with axes in their hands, hurried to shore.

The river bed broadened downstream and became even more shallow, its surface so filled with snags and sawyers that it resembled a forest of dead trees under flood. Again and again it was necessary to use the spars. Broken wheels had to be repaired. Unexpected jolts became common, and the gamblers no longer left their game to watch the crew at work. Indeed, they did not even glance up with curiosity at the spherical red clay huts of the Mandan villages, looking like bake ovens of a brick kiln. Always when the boat was sighted at such camps, crowds of Indians in long buffalo robes collected on the bank or climbed to the tops of their huts for a better view. Among their lodges stood the stages for the dead, and just outside the village high poles were hung with pottery, skins, weapons, and all manner of offerings to their gods. Along the bank, under the willows, naked brown children peered at the steamboat and as it came closer scampered under cover like wild hares.

After forty-six perilous days the *Omega*, more battered than ever, her paint scraped off and her sides bruised, rounded the last bend. Glittering in the sun like a Mexican fire-opal, St. Louis rose arrogantly on her limestone terrace. Boats lined the wharves. Busy stevedores rolled cargo up and down the piers. Warehouses, lumberyards, manufacturing plants, wholesale and jobbing houses crowded together on a rapidly rising ground between the river and the old French quarter where steep roofs seemed to jostle one another as they struggled to rise into the morning light. Everything blazed with color.

The sight was painfully beautiful to the priest. He was home again.

LaBarge's hand firmly gripped his arm. "There will be great rejoicing at the bishop's house today," the Frenchman said. "*Mon père*, St. Louis loves you. With all her heart she does."

## IV

Ave María Purísima

1843-1844

### I

On a December night in 1842 Monseigneur Joseph Signay, Bishop of Quebec, sat writing in his library. He was wrapped in a woolen dressing gown, and in spite of the hearthfire, his feet in red flannel slippers were placed upon a foot-warmer. He had started a letter to Bishop Rosati of St. Louis, had, in fact, written half a page when, suddenly laying down his pen, he got up from his desk and walked to the window. His lean profile with its concave cheek and aquiline nose gave the appearance of old age. Cholera plagues, the great fire, the rebellion of 1837, and political troubles had aged the bishop beyond his years. Already his colleagues were discussing a successor.

From the window he could look directly over the lower town. A cold full moon washed twilight across the snow-covered roofs of Quebec. Situated on streets each of which was at a different level, the dwellings descended so precipitously that the bishop's house seemed to hang almost directly over the wharves a hundred and fifty feet below.

The bishop wondered if he was acting upon Father Blanchet's recommendation too readily. The vicar had always been a man of unmitigated enthusiasm. Was he not particularly hasty in this instance, urging the appointment of a missionary whom he had met only once? As for the bishop himself, he was somewhat unsympathetic towards the Jesuits. Unpleasant rumors had reached Canada about their affairs in California. It was true, however, that he had heard nothing adverse to the St. Louis establishment. This Belgian was said to have remarkable organizing ability, but

that in itself might be a disadvantage. Right now, according to Father Blanchet, he was traveling in Europe, collecting money. The monseigneur played absently with the fringe of his sash. Yes, that might indeed be a disadvantage. It seemed hardly fitting for a priest to go gadding about like a mendicant friar, as if the charge to which he had been assigned could do well without his spiritual guidance so long as money was forthcoming. Furthermore, the new diocese to be erected in Oregon had a double service to perform—one to the French Canadians and one to the natives. But this wanderer through the mountains, this priest from the wilderness, *ce camarade véritable* of savages, could he handle such a division of labor impartially? The bishop was doubtful. The fact that he was an American citizen was not encouraging. Men from the States rushed into their work like stampeding bison, and like bison too often they knew not where they were going. They lacked finesse.

On the other hand, he must admit that Father Blanchet stood, as it were, like a soldier on the battlefield. He knew the needs of his territory. Certainly he had handled his vicariate with aplomb, and with amazing subtlety had won the co-operation, even the affection of Hudson's Bay Company. Perhaps after all he was right in pressing the appointment of this—this— The bishop had already forgotten the missionary's name. He seemed to be forgetting a great many things of late. He shuffled back to his desk and picked up Father Blanchet's letter. Oh, yes, DeSmet—Pierre Jean DeSmet. "*Sans peur et sans reproche*" the vicar had written of him.

With a gesture of weariness Monseigneur Signay sat down and continued his letter to Bishop Rosati:

"I have omitted to say to your Grace when speaking of the choice of a bishop for Oregon territory that Abbé Blanchet, who might be considered in the connection, earnestly begs to be passed over. I only wish the rules of the Society of Jesus will put no obstacle in the way of Father DeSmet's acceptance of this dignity."



All day in Rome a drizzly rain fell. Down the wide avenue leading to St. Peter's Square a cold wind whipped it against the fiacres filled with eager tourists and drenched the fine black horses drawing the occasional carriage of a bishop or cardinal. Pedestrians hidden beneath umbrellas clung to the scant protection of overhanging balconies and doorways, from which now and then red-lipped Roman grisettes peered into the rain-swept street.

Father DeSmet braced his umbrella against the wind. His feet were wet. The hem of his cassock, dripping with water, was wrinkled and spattered from the mud of passing carriages.

"I am in fine condition for an audience with the Pope," he thought. "I disgrace the Society. But no matter. His Holiness will think that I am indeed fit for a life among savages."

After having traveled through Ireland, England, and France, soliciting funds and missionaries, the priest had grown a little travel-worn and careless in his ways. He had noticed with surprise that, whether he dined with a prelate or a parish priest, his own manners appeared rough and somewhat unkempt. With more amusement than concern, he had given the matter momentary thought before dismissing it. After all, he had decided, one cannot live five years among the Indians and still retain the suavity of a European gentleman.

Under the colonnade in St. Peter's Square he passed a boot-black who lay curled up like a sleeping cat. The collar of his thin coat was drawn over his ears. Two peasants in sheepskin mantles stood watching one of the fountains. As the water descended in a fine white spray, the wind whirled it to the side like the fronds of a tossing willow tree. Father DeSmet was just opposite the fountain when he noticed that two buttons of his cassock were gone.

"Courage, Pierre," he thought, looking at the knobs of broken thread. "Is your heart in the Kingdom of God or in the kingdom of this world?"

The crouching beggars did not hold out their hands to the

huge, gray-haired priest as he entered the basilica. But a hump-backed old woman, leaning on a crooked stick, stared curiously at his brown skin and square Dutch bob.

From St. Peter's Father DeSmet went to the Vatican. Inside the great palace he felt flushed, and a dull ache throbbed in his head. To a man accustomed to wilderness and solitude, the crowds of people, riotous colors, frescoes, and richly ornamented walls were bewildering. Everywhere, admiring the paintings or chatting with acquaintances, women in black dresses and veils waited for an audience with the Pope. Here and there stood *valets de chambre* clad in red damask and *camerieri segreti* pompous in their black velvet doublets, ruffs, and gold chains and crosses. Priests, monks, nuns, army officers, diplomats wandered restlessly from room to room.

Around these men and women, over their heads, and even under their feet, swarmed another populous world, which all the genius of the Renaissance had struggled to create. Father DeSmet stood amazed, looking at the ceiling where angels swirled from the clouds; horses galloped across the heavens; and the stars and the moon were blotted out. On the walls Israelites with the features of Italian peasants bent to scoop up handfuls of manna; Paul stopped on the road to Damascus, hearing the Lord's voice; Plato and Aristotle walked together; and Athenians gathered in the agora to listen to a new philosophy. Sometimes the mild face of a sculptured Virgin, the patient figure of a painted Christ, or the long-suffering eyes of a saint looked down in quietness from the confusion of cylindrical torsos, necks like columns, round arms, and biceps like the coils of a python. Near the priest a group of children, wearing white dresses and first communion veils, stood looking at a cluster of marble cupids. A lean friar with sandals on his feet lingered before the terra-cotta face of a Saint Jerome.

Father DeSmet walked on, dizzied by the rainbow-colored mosaics, the walls hung with Gobelins, and the sculptured Renaissance angels. In the *Sala Clementina*, with its decorated walls and marvelous inlaid floor, a Swiss Guard in a fantastic red and yellow uniform directed him to the *Anti-Camera Segreta*. There

a member of the Noble Guard, in a light blue tunic, white breeches, and plumed helmet, bowed and bade him wait. Some other personages were ahead of him—a bishop clad in a purple cassock; a gentleman in a cutaway and striped gray trousers; and his companion, a large, full-bosomed lady who was dressed in the required black, but whose plump, freckled fingers were covered with jewels. Father DeSmet was shocked by them. "You may put me in black," the woman's eyes seemed to say, "but you cannot humble me even before the Pope. Look at my rings!"

No one seemed aware of the missionary in his worn, muddy cassock. He waited a long time. Finally a door opened and his name was called. Leading him past the three scarlet and gold chairs of the smaller throne room, the guard opened a second door. Father DeSmet heard his voice but did not know what he was saying, for all at once he saw a white figure and knew it was the Pope.

He bowed his head and made a genuflexion to the floor. Before he had reached the center of the room, however, the Pope had risen and come forward. Father DeSmet's lips touched the Fisherman's Ring. Then without giving him an opportunity to kneel, Pope Gregory clasped him to his breast and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Holy Father!" DeSmet gasped in confusion. "I am wet and muddy." He was looking into the kind, friendly face of an old man, that radiated the same wisdom and understanding which he had seen so often written on the faces of other Roman prelates.

"One can hardly walk through the rain and keep dry," the Pope was saying in Latin as he indicated a chair at the side of his work table. The tone of his voice dispelled the bewilderment in the priest's heart.

They were in the private library of the Vatican. The simple furniture, the rows of books, and the gray, rain-streaked light from three large windows were peaceful after the maze of people and frescoes. Pope Gregory seated himself at the end of the table. He was very pale in his white soutane and skullcap, pale and humble.

"Father Roothan has told me a great deal about you," he said, "but I am anxious to know more. You have come to Europe for funds, have you not?"

"Yes, your Holiness."

"And have you found our Catholics sympathetic to missionary work?"

"Sympathetic to the extent of thirty thousand American dollars. Holy Father, I am truly grateful to them."

"Will you return alone?"

"Five priests and six sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are going to Oregon with me."

"Ah! That is fine. You have had great success with the natives, I understand, but undoubtedly you are in need of more missionaries. Tell me, is the United States favorable to Catholicism?"

"Your Holiness, the government is friendly to all religions, or perhaps indifferent to them."

"But is it not true that the Christianization of the natives will decrease the Indian wars?"

"On the frontier nothing can be done. A little liquor makes the Indians insane. A law has been passed to prevent its sale, but there is no means of enforcing the law. Whisky is making the fur traders rich. Wherever they come the Indian is ruined."

"Not a very cheerful report," the Pope said. "Is that the story you tell when you ask for funds?"

"No, indeed, Holy Father. That is on the frontier. My Flat-heads are hidden in the mountains, isolated from contact with civilization, and I hope to keep them so."

Pope Gregory shook his head. "A sad commentary on Christianity, that one can make Christians only by keeping the new Christians away from the old."

"It is not so different from what the fathers did in Paraguay," DeSmet answered.

"Paraguay!" the Pope echoed softly. "Paraguay is already a dream."

"It is our inspiration and our hope," the priest said.

The two men were silent for a little. Then Father DeSmet



continued regretfully, "I love America, Holy Father, but it has little of continental Christianity, little of the cultured humanism of the Catholic faith. The spirit of God has given way to the spirit of progress. Nowhere in the same community are so many elements of discord to be found. That seems to be the meaning of liberty."

"Discord in religious faiths?" the Pope asked.

"In everything, your Holiness. The tendency is to extremes."

The Pope nodded. "It is a home of fugitives, of rebels and of outcasts."

"Yes, a home of fugitives and a home of dreamers. And the one great dream is wealth. But my Flatheads are untouched. They are children in the Kingdom of God. Holy Father, they have sent you a message."

The Pope smiled. "I shall be happy to hear it."

"It is one that demands a reply," Father DeSmet said, looking at the Pope slyly. "One day I was telling them something about life in Europe, how many martyrs have been slain for our faith, how Pope Pius was abducted and died in exile, and how for eighteen hundred years Mother Church has gloriously survived all her enemies. The Indians were greatly troubled to hear these things, and Insula—you would love him—rose and said, 'Should our Great Father, the great chief of the Blackrobes, be in danger, you speak to him on paper. Send him a message in our name and invite him to our mountains. We will raise his lodge in our midst. We will hunt for him and will guard him against his enemies.' I promised to deliver the message to you."

The Pope laughed softly. "Give those good savages my apostolic blessing," he said.

"Shall I tell them you cannot accept?" Father DeSmet asked.

"On the contrary," the Pope said, "tell them I may." Then he added with a seriousness which the priest never forgot, "Truly the time is at hand when we shall be forced to quit Rome. Where shall we go? God alone knows."

"Holy Father, if the church does not prosper in Europe, perhaps the New World will be its Zion."

"None of us can know God's will," the Pope replied. "But

sometimes I think there is little hope here. You are changing the hearts of simple children, but we must change those whose hearts are hardened, who have willfully turned away. That is difficult. One must take men as they are, you know, by the smooth handle. One may labor to make them what they ought to be, but they cannot be shaped by hammering. I am interested in what you say about America. Are you acquainted with the new envoy to Madrid?"

"Mr. Washington Irving?" the missionary asked.

"Yes. He has written a book about your country."

"I know it, your Holiness, *A Tour on the Prairies*. It is a fine book."

"I wish to read it, Father. It is regrettable that I do not know the English language, but one of the Vatican scholars is translating it into Italian." Pope Gregory sat very straight in his chair, with his pale hands resting on the arms and his head bent slightly forward. He was looking at Father DeSmet intently. "Perhaps you know that the Provincial Council of Baltimore has recommended that a vicariate-apostolic be formed in Oregon," he said.

Father DeSmet was surprised. "No. When I was in western Oregon, at Fort Vancouver, Father Blanchet, who comes from the diocese of Quebec, mentioned the possibility of a bishopric, but the population is still scarce. A vicar-apostolic would suit its needs better."

The Pope nodded. "I know it is not customary for a Jesuit to accept the episcopal dignity, but the situation in Oregon is somewhat singular."

Father DeSmet suddenly laid his two brown hands upon the table. "Your Holiness," he said, with a trace of excitement in his voice, "Father Blanchet is a man of experience. He has handled a very difficult situation—a situation both political and religious—with remarkable astuteness. If you will permit me the presumption, I think no better man could be recommended for the post."

The pale fingers of the Pope's left hand thrummed quietly on the arm of his chair. "Your name, Father DeSmet, has been recommended most highly."

The missionary was so genuinely distressed that his confidence vanished. "I appreciate, I am indeed grateful for such undeserved confidence. But, Holy Father, I beg of you to consider the problem a moment from my viewpoint. Father Blanchet is a man older than I, a man of wider experience. The country north of the Columbia River is under the control of Hudson's Bay Company, an English concern. Father Blanchet has earned and won the friendship of its governor, without which his hands would have been completely tied. The employees are Catholics, French-Canadians, whose background is similar to the vicar's."

"I understand that Oregon is a very large country," the Pope said. "This Fort Vancouver of the Hudson's Bay Company is only one town."

"Yes, your Holiness. And the country is too large for one man to know. There are dozens of little fish-eating tribes along the Pacific Coast. There are tribes in the desert that have no horses and no weapons, but live miserably on roots. There are rich Indians that cultivate their own fields. There are the terrible Blackfeet that wander over the buffalo country, leaving blood and death wherever they go. There are thousands of miles of mountains and canyons and deserts, and the natives are hidden away in the hollows of rocks and in valleys among the buttes."

"Then the new vicar-apostolic," the Pope suggested, "should be a man who knows Indians as well as Canadians."

Father DeSmet sighed helplessly. "Your Holiness, it is my happiness to obey the commands that are given to me. I go wherever I am sent. But my life and my hope are among the Indians. The vicar-apostolic will have no time to live with the natives, to teach them, to show them how to harvest their crops and recite their catechism. He cannot sit cross-legged on the ground eating a dog steak, nor sleep in a lice-infested hovel." The missionary looked at his muddy cassock in despair. "Holy Father, look at me. I am so much a savage that I came to you with the buttons missing from my cassock. Consider how I am not worthy of this dignity you suggest, how my culture is as frayed as my cuffs. At a dinner party, I am a sorry guest;

as a theologian, I am as useless as a child. The robes of a prelate would not fit me. But as a poor priest among the savages, I make bold to think I have the grace of God. I hope it is God's will that I die among them."

"Father, you will have the grace of God wherever you go," the Pope said, rising. "This is a matter which has not yet been decided, but you may leave with your mind at rest. The Indians do not have many friends such as you, and I would not hastily deprive them of your service."

"Forgive me if I have forgotten my humility in this matter," Father DeSmet said in embarrassment, as he knelt to receive the apostolic blessing. Then Pope Gregory graciously turned his back and walked away, relieving the missionary of the need to back out of the room.

## 3

In Brussels Father DeSmet gave a conference upon his missions to the pupils of St. Michael's College. His servant, disguised as an Indian in war paint and buffalo robe, at first terrified the boys and then amused them as he sat cross-legged on the floor, smoking a formidable calumet. In Mechlin the priest chatted for hours with his old friends. But he was happiest in Termonde. There he slept in his own bed again. There he was still Joost DeSmet's boy who had played among the fishing boats and, just when everyone thought the shipowner's son would be a fine help in his father's business, had gone into the seminary at Mechlin and become a priest.

"*Wel, wel!* Is it not Pierre DeSmet?" someone called to him as he walked down to the market place of his home town. "*Wie zoude het kunnen gelooven!* How good it is to see you. You have more of your father's manner now that you are older."

"Jean Peeters!" the missionary exclaimed, thankful that he had not forgotten the name of the old sexton who stood before him nervously twisting his cap. "How fine you look. I don't think you will ever grow old."

"Eighty years last June, Pierre, and I can still ring the bells on Sunday!"



"*Maar ziet, maar ziet!*" came a jovial voice from behind the fish booths. You have grown fat, Father Pierre—more like a burgomaster than a missionary, I think."

But before Father DeSmet could excuse himself from the sexton and greet the one-time playmate who had just hailed him, a stooped, withered creature, holding a shawl over her head, was at his elbow. "If it isn't Moeder Buydens!" The priest kissed her upon the forehead.

"Ah, you remember everyone, don't you? Even Moeder Buydens who has been without her teeth these last five years." The old midwife was smiling into his face with affection. "Pierre, what a pity your mother cannot see you now."

"I think she can, Moeder Buydens. Don't you?"

"Then she is very proud, and she is glad, I think, that my hands did not fumble when I helped to bring you into the world."

So it had been whenever he stepped out of the house at Termonde; and whenever he entered it again, high-pitched laughter rang down the halls, and a patter of feet hurried along the stairs as the five children of his brother Charles gathered about him. They had paraded everywhere in their moccasins and bone necklaces and had broken into squeals of joy when the priest tucked their dachshund Fidele under his arm.

"I have a roebuck with big horns, a deer, and a tame bear that follows me everywhere on the prairies and is as quiet and gentle as Fidele."

"Can you carry him under your arm?" Elmira asked, pushing the curls from her face.

"No, the bear is too big for that," Father DeSmet said as he settled into an armchair.

Clemence leaned over to stroke Fidele lovingly. "Do your animals bite?"

"Bite! Indeed not. They are as patient and lovable as the animals that trotted after the dear St. Francis. If you would all come back with your uncle, Sylvia could ride on the bear's back; Clemence and Elmira on the roebuck. And, little Rosalie,

you could mount the deer, and we would all ride over the hills together."

"Uncle Pierre," Rosalie cried, climbing into his lap against Fidele's wishes, "take me back. I want to ride the deer."

"And what would your poor father and mother do without you?" the missionary asked as he drew an arm around her.

"Tell us a story, Uncle Pierre," Clemence begged.

"As if I had not told you a dozen already. Well, if you wish. But remember, this is a true story. Uncle Pierre lives in fairyland, so all the fairy tales he knows are true."

"Are there fairies in America?" Rosalie was wide-eyed.

"I never saw any, Rosalie, but perhaps there are. This is a story about a bear. One winter evening, in the depth of a forest, I was all alone and it began to snow. It snowed so hard the ground became white in the twinkling of an eye. It snowed so hard all the rabbits and squirrels ran into their holes. I couldn't see ahead of me, or behind me, or to the side of me. It was getting darker and darker, and there was no way to get home. So I began to wander through the forest, hoping I could find a little sheltered place to sleep in."

"Weren't there any houses?" Sylvia asked.

"Of course not," little Charles said crossly. "This was in the woods."

"Finally I found a hollow tree. The hole was high, but I climbed up to it and crawled inside."

"Uncle Pierre, it must have been a big tree for you to get inside," Elmira put in.

"It was, Elmira. Some of the trees in Oregon are as big as this whole room. When I got to the bottom of the hole, something warm moved under my feet. It was a family of baby bears. 'Well,' Uncle Pierre thought to himself, 'this will be warm.' And I sat down among the cubs. But before I had fallen asleep, I heard a sound. 'Grunt, grunt!' it said. It grew louder and louder, and I knew the mother bear was coming home. Then I heard her claws scraping the bark of the tree. She climbed up; then down she came backward into the hole."

"Oh, weren't you frightened?" Clemence asked.

"Yes, I was, because there wasn't room for both of us and the cubs too. But I reached both arms up, and when she was near enough I grabbed her legs as hard as I could, just above the foot so she couldn't claw me. I pulled and pulled with both hands. She was frightened, so she began to pull the other way, and as soon as I let go, she climbed up again, out of the tree, and ran off into the forest. So I slept all night with her cubs. The next morning it had stopped snowing and I found my way home."

"Did you take the baby bears with you?" Charles wanted to know.

"No, Charles. If I won't take Rosalie away from her mother and father, why should I have taken the cubs away from their mother? I left them there, and for all I know they are still asleep in the hollow of the tree."

Such were the days passed in Termonde. Yet sometimes at night the missionary wakened, wanting to push away the softness of his feather bed. And when he walked down the city streets, the buildings seemed oppressive, the air heavy, and the stolid people preoccupied with trivial affairs. "I have no patience," he told himself, longing for the wide horizons and free air of Oregon. When at last he kissed the children good-by and gave his brother a final blessing, it was hard to conceal his eagerness.

## 4

On the day when the *Infatigable*, the brig which Father DeSmet had chartered, put to sea, a mist hung over Antwerp, blurring the tall-masted schuyts and red-sailed fishing boats that slid silently down the River Schelde. Six sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, three Italian priests, and the missionary stood on deck, looking wistfully at the dark shadow of the cathedral tower which was soon to disappear forever.

"Napoleon was right," Father Anthony Ravalli said to DeSmet. "That tower is like a piece of Mechlin lace. Yet wonderful as it is, I am happy to turn all Antwerp into sea."

The missionary laughed. "Twenty or thirty days from now,

Father, you will be wanting to turn all the ocean into Antwerp."

"How long does it take to go around the Horn?"

"That depends on the weather," Father DeSmet said.

Sister Bertha, a tall, strong-faced woman, with yellow-brown eyes and a fringe of soft dark hair on her upper lip, touched Father DeSmet's arm. "Shall we be far from the ocean in Oregon?" she asked. Sister Bertha had grown up in a Netherland fishing village.

"No, not far."

Father Michael Accolti sighed. "If we can build our house within sight of the sea and plant vineyards, will it not be like Italy, Father Pierre?"

"I am afraid not," Father DeSmet said. "But you will find that you are at home wherever God is. The sun does not shine on the Oregon coast as in southern Italy. Gray mists and sheets of cold rain come down from the mountains, and the sand of the shore is black."

The Italian turned his face away so that his companions could not read his thoughts.

Sister Agniet, the youngest of the nuns, sensing the nostalgia which the others already felt, said cheerfully, "Tell us about the children, Father, the ones in Oregon who are waiting for us."

It seemed to Father DeSmet that there had been something sad in that departure. The words of his companions lacked the joy and hope and enthusiasm for God's work which he had anticipated. He had offered these nuns and priests an opportunity, but they had turned it into a sacrifice. Yet when the vessel struck the North Sea, listing under the force of the wind, Sister Bertha's calm fortitude and Father Ravalli's good nature reassured him. Indeed the cheerfulness of the company grew with the increasing rigors of the journey.

For long days they washed through heavy seas which left a slippery deposit of white, salt-water lime on the hard pine sweep of the main deck. Then, opposite the sheer, basaltic precipices of the Madeira Islands, the vessel lay becalmed on a smooth,



green ocean. The nuns sang to the tune of the spunyarn winch. Sailors hurried by with tar buckets and bights of rope. And Father DeSmet wiled away the hours, telling his companions about the missions of Paraguay.

"Are you going directly to the Flatheads from Fort Vancouver?" Father Ravalli asked him one day.

"For a little while," the priest answered. "Then I am going to find the Blackfeet."

"The Blackfeet?"

"Yes. You know the Flatheads depend on the buffalo country for their food. The Blackfeet claim the same hunting ground, which means that at least twice a year there is war between the two tribes. If I were to forbid fighting the Flatheads would be exterminated. I should like to make peace between the two tribes."

"Where will you find the Blackfeet?"

"That is hard to tell. East of the Canadian Rockies perhaps."

Weeks later as the vessel drifted toward the equator, the air in the brig became foul. The beams overhead and the bulkheads were infested with layers of cockroaches. Little white worms crawled over everything. At dinner the hash was riddled with them. Then at last the brig began to lift the Southern Cross and the Clouds of Magellan. A great white albatross, with outstretched, motionless wings, followed in the vessel's wake, and mysterious cape pigeons skimmed over the billows. A swell came up from the south. Icebergs floated in the distance. Two days later the crew prepared to battle the storms off Cape Horn.

Night after night the steep decks were covered with cascading waters. Once Father DeSmet, venturing to the poop, returned to tell the nuns that the ship was white with snow, the ropes ice-covered, and the canvas stripped to rags. Thereafter the missionaries stayed below, praying; and learned of their progress only from the sailors who passed now and then in dripping, tattered oilskins and leaking boots.

Not until they were west of the Cape did the winds subside. For a while the Island of Juan Fernandez blotted the sky

dark blue. Then it too was gone. On April twelfth, three months after leaving Antwerp, the *Infatigable*, like a wounded bird, with torn sails and battered hull, limped into the Bay of Valparaiso. She dipped her ensign to the ships anchored there, and her crew sang lustily a gay song:

*Ali, alo, pour Maschero!*

*Ali, ali, alo.*

*Il mang' la viande et nos donn' les os.*

*Ali, ali, ali, alo,*

*Ali, ali, alo.*

*Il boît le vin et nous donn' d' l'eau.*

Sister Bertha cried, "The New World!"

"And the new life," Father DeSmet echoed.

There were tears in Sister Agniet's eyes. "I want to touch the grass," she murmured.

"There isn't much grass on those hills," Father Accolti put in.

In fact, the mountains seemed to be barren of trees and shrubs. They rose abruptly from the water, formidable and sterile, but little red adobes climbed their sides to a perilous height, and narrow paths of the same bright color cut across the hills in every direction like a tangle of scarlet threads.

Impatient to land the missionaries hugged their bundles of clothing. Suddenly they realized that the ship had lost way. Behind them over and over the crew kept repeating the same vivacious tune:

*Ali, alo, pour Maschero!*

*Ali, ali, alo . . .*

They heard the sound of the windlass.

"We are anchoring!" Father DeSmet cried, and turning about he saw that the sailors had divided into two groups. One anchor was being cast on a low, rocky promontory and another in the channel. Captain Guizon stood on the poop, his hands clasped behind him.

"Captain Guizon!" the priest shouted. "Why are we anchoring?"

The captain came down to the main deck. Like the weather-beaten sails his face had grown dark and hard and worn. "Valparaiso is a fine city when you're not in it," he said, "the sun on those houses and all . . ."

"Aren't we going in?" Father DeSmet asked.

"I see you have your bundles," the captain replied. "That's too bad. No, we can't go in tonight. The wind's blowing fresh enough out here, but it doesn't go so far into the bay. We'd be driven on the bank or have to let go our anchor in fifty fathom . . ."

"How long must we wait?" Sister Agniet interrupted him.

The captain laughed. "We shall weigh early in the morning and go in with the *conçon*."

"The *conçon*?"

"That's the land breeze. You'll have a good night's rest and one more meal of salt pork and sea biscuit."

Sister Agniet bit her lip. "Sister Bertha, I'll take your bundle back," she said, "and yours, Sister Ursula." When she reached for them her hand was trembling.

They watched her go away. "She is so young," Father DeSmet said. "Sometimes I wonder if we should have brought her."

"She is a firm little tree," Sister Bertha answered, "but the wind has not yet bent her to its will. God shapes His loved ones slowly, I think, not with one turn, lest they break, but with many little hurts."

After dinner from the prow they watched the city lights come out one by one until, far up, the hillsides glittered like Christmas trees with burning candles. Thinking of Oregon, Father DeSmet regretted the enforced visit at Valparaiso, but the *Infatigable* was badly in need of repairs. Yes, the feel of a horse would be good again, he thought, and the old smell of the lice-infested huts. The sisters would be happy at the fort. They could open a school for the children and start an orphanage. But he must go to the Bitter Root Valley at once. He be-

gan to wonder about Francis Xavier's wife, about Old Simon, and whether Mina-Yougha still knelt to pray, arranging her bracelets like a French coquette. Father Ravalli had brought three small buhrstones for a grist mill. There would be good use for them.

The crew of another vessel began singing a chantey in a strange tongue. Their voices drifted across the bay like an incantation. All at once the lights of Valparaiso seemed to Father DeSmet like candles about an altar and the foreign song like a litany sung by some Indian nation in the Rocky Mountains.

## 5

The next morning the missionaries, carrying their bundles, were walking over the beach, past fishermen's cabins and canoes drying on the sand, past the slaughter houses, to the main thoroughfare of Valparaiso. Everywhere the streets overflowed with Chinese, Indians, and Mestizos. Long caravans of mules plodded by, bringing to market loads of freshly gathered *cochayuyo*. The bronze bells swinging from the necks of the *madrinas* made a lazy sound. Oxen, their heads forced low by the weight of their yokes, dragged thundering two-wheeled carts over the cobblestones. Olive-skinned *huasos* or mountaineers, wearing *ponchos*, purple trousers, and spurs with clanking rowels, loitered under overhanging balconies.

The feel of solid ground under his feet seemed strange to Father DeSmet. The travelers walked slowly, unsteadily, like convalescents who have long been confined to their beds. In spite of the pavement, the steep hills were difficult to climb. Far up, the twisted red paths appeared scarcely accessible to mountain goats. The priests had been invited to stay with some Jesuits of Buenos Aires who were in Valparaiso at the time; and some French nuns of the Order of Picpus had extended an invitation to the Sisters of Notre Dame.

The convent of the Sisters of Picpus was a long, low, adobe building huddled behind a red adobe wall. Gray pigeons were foraging in the dead, spiny grass. Near the door stood a twisted tree with cracked, black bark and thorny boughs. Father DeSmet



picked up an iron bell, not different from those he had seen around the necks of the mules, and rang it. After some time a French nun appeared at the entrance.

"*Bienvenu!*" she said, making the sign of the cross. "*Entrez, mes chères soeurs.*" And before the priests could offer a greeting, the Sisters of Notre Dame had entered and the heavy door was closed again.

Father DeSmet and the Italians went directly to the Jesuit establishment. Father Gómila, Superior of the Missions, greeted his guests in broken French. He was a large, muscular man, whose coarse gray skin contrasted oddly with his sensitive, mobile mouth. He led the travelers into a narrow, dark room, furnished only with some low-cushioned chairs and a table of native *espino* wood. Father DeSmet noticed that the crucifix on the wall bore an unusually tragic Christ in natural colors. Blood was clotted about the nailholes, and from beneath the crown of thorns it dripped over His thin forehead. An image of the Holy Virgin stood in a corner. She was wearing a blue robe, and in one hand she held a lily.

"So you have only a week to spend among the *bárbaros*," Father Gómila said when his guests had been seated.

"We have been three months at sea," Father DeSmet answered. "A week on land is very welcome."

"A week in Valparaiso is long enough for most Europeans, and for Frenchmen it is a penance!" The Spaniard smiled. "What a pity you did not stop in Buenos Aires. Padres, she is the white flower of South America."

Father DeSmet's companions had shyly taken refuge in the shadows of the low room.

"Valparaiso is much larger than any settlement in Oregon," DeSmet said.

"Ah, yes," Father Gómila answered. "If size is a virtue, this city does very well. There are forty thousand of us here. Yet we Jesuits do not have it easy."

"I know," DeSmet said. "Continents are not civilized overnight."

"But they tell me it is different in your country," the Span-

iard continued. "I do not know what happens to my people when they come here. It is as if they leave their civilization behind them. They grow accustomed to the taste of blood and the feel of a knife blade in their fingers."

Father DeSmet nodded. "It is no different in the North, Father."

The other man glanced out of the window. "I grew up in Seville," he said wistfully. "I thought God's peace was everywhere until I came to the New World. On your way did you notice the pavement under your feet?"

Father DeSmet had, in fact, noticed it particularly, for it was made of little round pebbles carefully laid out in designs of stars and crosses.

"Those pebbles, Padre, are the carpus and tarsus, the wrist and ankle bones of the Spaniards. The Chileans were not satisfied with killing the men they hated. They paved the streets with their bones that they might every day stamp their heels upon them. We priests do not like to walk on the bones of our cousins."

"But Valparaiso is a Catholic city, is it not?" Father DeSmet asked.

"Yes, a kind of Catholicism Jesuits do not approve of. The Mestizos mortify and starve themselves at one moment and turn into gluttons at another. The native priests impose terrible penances upon sinners, as the law imposes terrible punishments upon criminals. I cannot go out on the streets and speak what I feel, so I say nothing—but I pray and do my work, and sometimes a vessel will come with a few priests from Europe and I unburden my heart to them."

"The road that leads to Christ is a long one," DeSmet said. "Sometimes we cannot see the progress we are making."

"The children of Chile, Padre, have been born to earthquakes and tyranny and bloodshed. The gentleness of Jesus Christ and the purity of His Holy Mother are something they will never understand."

There were footsteps in the street. Then the merry sound of a guitar. "They love music," he added sadly. "That is a good

thing. But we will talk about this again. You said Mass on the boat no doubt, but have had no breakfast. We must give you a taste of our native food."

He led the missionaries down a long, dark corridor into the refectory.

Some days later, before the sun had topped the red hills, Father Gómila came from his prayers. "To have seen Santiago is to have seen Chile," he said. "The rains have not yet begun and the roads are passable, if you care to go."

Because all the visiting priests except Father Louis Ver-cruysse and Father DeSmet were making a retreat, two carriages sufficed. They were brought to the door, each drawn by a team of horses on one of which the postilion was mounted. A guide and four relay horses completed the equipage. The guide was a swaggering fellow with thick lips and the bronze eyes of an animal.

Thin, ascetic Father Landau came into the long, low-ceilinged room where the priests waited. "*Que lástima!*" he complained. "Dear Father Gómila, the jerked meat which was to go to the mission is ruined."

"Ruined?" Father Gómila asked.

"*Polillas* again! I told the cook to keep those bundles off the floor."

"I will speak to him, Father Landau, but the carriages are ready."

Father DeSmet and Father Gómila entered the first and the other priests took the second. Riding together, the Belgian and the Spaniard could not have shown greater contrast. Father Gómila, dark, somber, and melancholic, had found his God in the Crucifixion; Father DeSmet's light eyes, gray hair, and laughing mouth were a symbol of the resurrected Christ. It was as if Good Friday and Easter Sunday rode together.

The highway which they followed beyond the city twisted around precipitous hills and was scarcely wide enough for two carriages to pass. Since there was almost a continuous procession of wagons, donkeys, mules, horses, and ox-carts, bringing merchandise from Santiago, it required the skill of both postilion and

guide to manage their progress. At one moment they were driven into the wall of the hill; at another they looked down upon a low, green valley, having been forced to the outer edge of the cliff by a train of six or eight enormous wagons, each drawn by a half dozen yoke of oxen. The driver of the first roughly goaded his beasts with a long bamboo or *picana*. Another native was perched upon a folded sheepskin between the horns of the animal, his naked legs dangling in the air. He yelled incoherent blasphemies at the priests, while postilion and guide attempted to force the carriages closer and closer to the edge of the precipice.

"*Madre de Dios!*" the native shouted, shaking his fist. "This road does not belong to God. Make way for the devil!"

As the roar of wagon wheels died away, Father DeSmet heard a flock of green and yellow parrots scream raucously from a clump of gigantic cacti covered with scarlet flowers. Far up, at the summit of the tallest upas trees, ring-doves cooed softly. The horses hurried over the red road for a little way; then, descending a long, abrupt declivity, they suddenly stopped. Ahead of them another wagon was crawling downhill. A pair of oxen had been fastened by their horns to the rear of the vehicle to serve as a brake. They shook their heads obstinately, fighting to free themselves, and were dragged on against their will. At the foot of the hill a Mestizo was beating his ass unmercifully.

Father Gómila put his head out of the carriage window. "May the Lord forgive you for your sins," he cried. "You are striking the beast that bore the blessed Jesus to His triumph."

The Mestizo looked up surprised. "*Sí, Padre,*" he said scornfully, "if this cursed ass took me to my triumph, I would not beat her. Be off and save your own soul."

From the summit of the Cuesta de Prado Father DeSmet looked down upon the well-cultivated plain of Santiago, covered with trees and irrigated by the Mapocho and Mayu Rivers. In the distance glittered the towers and belfries of the capital. On three sides the Andes formed an immense semi-circle, their snow-blanketed peaks dazzling in the sun.



"We will lodge at the *hacienda* of Señor Ramón Ruiz-Tagle," Father Gómila said. "He is one of the richest proprietors of the republic. The peons whisper strange tales about him. Only one man in Chile, they say, ever knew the truth, and that was Father Antonio Álvarez, to whom the rancher confessed some stupendous crime."

"What does he raise on his *hacienda*?" Father DeSmet asked.

"He has vast olive orchards. After he was taken into the church he kept his doors open for Father Álvarez. But the good padre aged rapidly, in spite of all the comfort and luxury of Señor Tagle's red adobe walls. Before dying, however, he found a wife for his penitent, a young Mestizo girl who had been received into the convent of the Barefooted Carmelites. The cloisters did not agree with her and she was forced to leave before her vows were taken. Shortly after the marriage, Father Álvarez was seized with a heart attack, fell from his horse, and died."

The carriages of the priests had already reached the olive orchards of Señor Tagle, which leaned against a dilapidated fortress wall east of the city. They entered a long drive, and at the sound of wheels upon the road a Negro came out of the ranch house. Father Gómila did not alight from his carriage but asked for the proprietor. The Negro disappeared; and a few minutes later a robust man with a heavy jowl, a long mustache, and a tangle of coarse black hair appeared. He wore a close-fitted blue coat and a scarlet sash about his waist.

"*Gracias á Dios!*" he cried, seeing the priest. "It is for surprises such as this that I thank the blessed St. Michael."

"Father Landau and I have brought two guests to Santiago," Father Gómila began.

"And they will be lodged at the *hacienda* of Don Ramón, I hope," the Chilean replied. "Come in at once."

Inside the *hacienda* the travelers, still blinded from the bright sunshine, could see little more than the face of a woman silhouetted against a window at the far end of the room.

"Mercedes," Don Ramón said to her, "we have guests, may God be thanked. Father Gómila, Father Landau, and their friends."

The young woman rose slowly and came forward with the silent cautiousness of a cat. "You are welcome," she said simply. In the dimness of the room her face seemed very white, her hair and eyes very dark.

As Father DeSmet became more accustomed to the subdued light, he could see that the room was furnished with figured carpets, low seats, tapestries, and two or three exquisitely carved chairs upholstered in red velvet. Doña Mercedes reclined languidly on a wide sofa. She was so slender there seemed to be no body under her black lace gown.

"So you are from Belgium," their host said, looking at Father DeSmet with intense curiosity. "The last guests Father Gómila brought to us were lay brothers from Italy. I have never been to Europe, but by the padre's generosity, Europe *poco á poco* is coming to me."

"You are fortunate," Father Vercruysse said. "The trip around the Horn should be suffered only by those who have committed the unpardonable sin."

Don Ramón shrugged his shoulders. "I have sailed around the Horn, Padre. Perhaps you have never been in an earthquake or in the gold mines of Peru. There is more than one hell in South America."

"And there has been more than one paradise," Father DeSmet put in.

"Where?" Don Ramón asked, smiling. "I should like to visit them."

"I think you have built one here, Monsieur. The other was once in Paraguay. It is gone now."

"Are you thinking of the missions?" the rancher asked.

"Yes. Have you heard of them?"

"Sí, Señor. I have been there."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Father DeSmet leaned forward in his chair. "You have really seen them, my friend?"

A Negro appeared and passed cigars. Doña Mercedes took a long brown *cigarillo*, lighted it, and stared gloomily out of the window as if unaware of her guests.

"Shall I give your friends a little *chácoli*?" Don Ramón asked Gómila.

"Let them have a real taste of Chile," Gómila suggested. "*Mate*, Señor."

"*Mate* is our national drink," the host explained to the priests. "It is made of the *yerba del Paraguay*, a little sugar, a bit of lemon, and some warm water. Whoever has drunk *mate* will never stoop to the vulgarity of European liquors."

"My dear Don Ramón," Father Landau said dryly, "*mate* is such a delicacy it should be allowed only to Jesuit priests."

Don Ramón laughed. "If that were the case we should all be Jesuits."

"When were you in Paraguay?" Father DeSmet asked.

"Ah, yes, you want to hear about the missions. It was long before I came to Santiago. I was a fugitive and had fled by night up the Paraná River and hidden in the jungles. In the morning I left the woods, striking across what must have been a cultivated field years before, for here and there hemp was growing among the tangle of native vegetation, and once I caught sight of a few head of half-wild cattle, which upon hearing me, broke into the brush and disappeared."

The Negro reappeared with *mate* in an oval gourd. After first sucking upon the *bombilla* or tube, to see if the drink had been sweetened enough, he passed it to the guests. Father DeSmet found the sticky, warm infusion rather cloying, but the two Spanish priests drank with unfeigned pleasure.

"Did you find any of the towns?" Father DeSmet asked.

"I was in only one, a neglected, miserable little village. A few Indians lived along its deserted streets. Hoping to find some relief from the heat, I went into a ruined stone church, with a tumble-down tower, the belfry of which was hidden by lianas. Apparently it had not been used for a long time. Some of the images were broken, and everything was veiled with cobwebs and dust."

"Did you talk with the Guaranis?"

"No, Padre. I did not know their language. My appearance must have frightened them, for they hid in their huts. I

was in great haste to get as far from Buenos Aires as possible, so I went on up the Paraná."

Señor Tagle seemed to consider his story at an end, for he began sucking his *mate* in silence.

Father DeSmet watched him with disappointment in his eyes. "Is that all?" he asked at last.

"Yes, Padre. That is all."

"A ruined church and a few head of cattle," the missionary murmured, "and less than a hundred years have passed. It will be different in the Rocky Mountains."

"Tomorrow we will drive into Santiago," Father Gómila said. "You will want to meet General Bulnes."

Don Ramón handed the empty gourd to the Negro. "I should like to show you the olive orchards, and when we come back Mercedes will sing for us."

The next day Father DeSmet was willing to agree that Santiago was the soul of Chile. There, on streets flagged with red stone, among fountains, beautiful houses, and wide avenues, he saw flagellants whipping themselves on their bare backs; he saw exotic girls leaning from windows to beckon the mountaineers. Once they passed an old man carrying a heavy cross of wood on his shoulders, his wrists bound to the sticks of it.

"A penitent," Father Gómila explained. "If the Jesuits had not been expelled from South America, Catholicism would be different here."

"That is not Catholicism," Father DeSmet said. "That is the temper of the people."

In the heart of the city a confusion of *calezas*, mule trains, oxen, and wagons forced their carriage to halt. A muleteer bringing ice shouted to the driver, "*Quienes son?*"

"Jesuits," the driver replied.

The white teeth of the muleteer flashed. Father DeSmet saw him turn to the *aguatero* who stood near him. "They are Jesuits," he said.

Indians, Mestizos, Negroes, slaves and Creoles crowded in such numbers around the vehicles and animals in the street that it was impossible for the traffic to move. An ice-carrier began



shouting oaths. Water dripped from the grass-covered packs on his mules, making brown spots on the pavement. Near a poison shop stood a brother of Buena Muerte. His small Mulatto face was almost hidden between the scarlet cross on his black habit and the high conical hat of his order. He saw a Dominican approach the Mulatto. They both looked at the carriage and then went into the poison shop.

The priests visited the monasteries and convents and in the evening dined with General Bulnes. When they left the president's palace the stars had come out. From everywhere the music of guitars drifted into dark streets. As they walked to their carriage, they saw a man and woman by the corner of the magnificent cathedral. The man had seized the girl's wrist and was twisting it. The dim light of a street lamp fell on her face, which was contorted with pain.

"I hate you, María," the man said. "By the blood of Christ, I will kill you."

The woman laughed in spite of the hurt. "You are in love," she murmured.

The voice of the watchman rang out, "*Ave María Purísima*, ten o'clock and clear!"

The priests climbed into their carriage. They were tired.

6

When the priests returned to Valparaiso, they found the *Infatigable* ready to sail.

"We have done some good work," Captain Guizon said. "We fumigated the ship and dumped fifteen hundred rats into the sea."

"Fifteen hundred rats and twelve passengers is a rather bad proportion," DeSmet said.

"That is not unusual," the captain answered. "Between Antwerp and Valparaiso the rats increased, but the number of my missionaries remained the same."

The nuns were merry. "It was so beautiful," Sister Agniet sighed. "I wanted to stay with the Sisters of Picpus forever."

"Father, green parrots came to our window," Sister Bertha said.

Once more the little brig pushed through squalls and bad weather. Once more she hung helpless between a somber sky and a black sea swelling and sinking ceaselessly. Intermittent winds, however, carried them farther north through the belt of flying fishes and phosphorescent lights. The strange stars fell under the horizon one by one. Then the Southern Cross and the Clouds of Magellan disappeared, and with them the months of May and June. Water grew scarce. All the food taken on board at the South American port was consumed except rice and salt meat.

When the coast of California lay against the rising sun, the men began to murmur about the Columbia Bar. Only one member of the crew had ever crossed it, a Chinese sailor whom Captain Guizon had taken on at Valparaiso. He refused to talk, and when the captain questioned him he only answered, "It is bad, very bad."

Chill, damp winds stung their faces, but the Pacific Ocean was blue. "As blue as the Mediterranean," Father Ravalli mused, thinking of home. Day after day they saw the dark line of mountains to the east.

"All of America must be Spain," Sister Bertha said, wondering that the land had no end.

"A Russian habituated to the vast steppes of Siberia might comprehend America," Father DeSmet said, "but for a Belgian—he can understand only by making the tedious, painful journey overland."

Toward the end of July they saw Cape Disappointment, the long peninsula which forms the north side of the entrance to the Columbia. Dark, precipitous, and ominous it was, a tall shadow behind the ocean mist.

"We are going to steer into open sea," Captain Guizon said. "We might run aground at night."

As the vessel moved slowly onward, leaving the shore in the distance, the priests on deck contemplated the high moun-

tains and vast forests of Oregon. Spirals of smoke curled up from Indian huts, hanging in a blue haze against the hills.

"We are almost home," Father DeSmet said, "and yet the most dangerous part of our voyage lies ahead."

"It looks utterly peaceful," Sister Agniet remarked.

Sister Bertha stood tall and brown. The fine mist from the air clung to the hairs on her upper lip. "That is when the sea is most dangerous. Sailors can fight a storm, but there's no battling the treachery of hidden sand."

"But if soundings are taken," the other nun persisted, "I should think there would be little difficulty."

"It's the cross-tide that makes it hard," Father DeSmet said.

Captain Guizon came up. "You see, a sandbank runs north from Point Adams, the southern peninsula, to within two miles of the upper point. Then another bank runs south from there. When the wind sets in strong, the sea breaks from point to point without any channel. Then when the channel is opened, the cross-tide changing every half hour makes it impossible for a ship to keep her position. The captain of a Dutch brig told me that when we were in Valparaiso."

"I should like to see your chart," Father DeSmet said.

"So should I. I've combed every port we've stopped in for a chart, but without any luck."

The Chinese sailor stood at the captain's elbow. "You stand mid-channel," he said, "until the bluff most far east, then keep close around Cape Disappointment."

"That doesn't tell us anything," Guizon said roughly. "What did you do when you were on that ship, hide in the hold?"

The Chinaman smiled and bowed. "I cook beans," he answered. "Five years ago I pretty young."

Early the next morning the missionaries celebrated Mass, and when they came on deck the mist was already lifting. The *Infatigable* moved slowly and cautiously toward the wide, fearful mouth of the Columbia. Ahead of them the white breakers rolled, foaming and tumbling over the bar.

"How wide is the bar?" Sister Bertha asked.

"Five miles," Father DeSmet said.

The sailors were hanging over the quarter-rail. "It is murder," one of them muttered.

"*Mon Dieu!*" the other groaned. "I have six children and my wife . . ."

The Chinese sailor had slid up to them. "If we stand mid-channel . . ."

One of the French sailors swung around. "You fool!" he growled. "Look at those breakers! Do you see any opening? Yes, we stand mid-channel, a fine idea! There's no channel there."

The missionaries sat on the poop. At intervals the priests read their prayers. The nuns sewed. But always the white tumult of the breakers spread across the ship's path so that the words of the breviary seemed futile, and the fingers holding the needle were cold.

About noon the mate came. "Captain Guizon will try anything," he said to Father DeSmet. "But you can see it would be madness. If we go to the Sandwich Islands . . ."

"We have been seven months coming here," Father DeSmet interrupted him. "By God's grace we rounded the Horn, Monsieur, and by God's grace we are going to cross the bar."

"Very well." The mate shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Now and then when groups of men gathered together in the forecastle, in the lee of the masts, or in the waist, the whispered conversation was always the same. "We can make the Sandwich Islands without trouble." "Will the captain let one priest send us all to our graves?" "Does the Jesuit think he can command the waves to be still?"

In the afternoon Captain Guizon began to fear mutiny. "My contract was to take you to Astoria," he said to Father DeSmet. "It was not to let you drown. At the Sandwich Islands . . ."

The priest's broad, tall figure was as powerful as the captain's. His gray hair and blue eyes were like a prophet's. "Monsieur," he said, "there are many times when one must put faith in God. Take your time. We will get in."



The vessel hove to, and one of the small boats was made ready to go out and sound, but the weather was so bad it could not be launched. Toward night the brig again stood out to gain sea-room. The sailors grumbled at mess. The rations of rice and salt meat were smaller. After dinner in the saloon the nuns sat quietly, praying without complaint. On the poop the priests watched the coast of Oregon, which was dotted with lighted fires. Twice Father DeSmet thought he heard the report of a cannon. In the darkness the breakers flashed white.

The next morning the sea was becalmed. It seemed as if they would hang within sight of land until they died of starvation or frenzy. Later in the day, however, a slight breeze stirred and the vessel stood in to seek the channel. Captain Guizon climbed to the masthead. When he came down he was gloomy. "We can't risk the passage," he said.

"Ship ho!" a voice cried.

Passengers and crew were alert. Far off in the distance a ship was making toward Cape Disappointment.

"Let's see how they come out and we can go in the same way," the mate suggested.

For an hour they hung over the rail watching the vessel as she came slowly nearer. Then just as the *Infatigable* displayed her signal of distress, the strange ship vanished.

Father Ravalli had lost patience. "We are going mad," he exclaimed, "to see visions!"

"I'm not so sure it was a vision," Captain Guizon put in. "In Valparaiso I learned that an English man-of-war had been sent out to blockade the entrance of the Columbia."

"She was only two-masted," the mate remarked.

At three in the afternoon a small boat with four men was put out. Everyone watched the little skiff rise and sink with the waves, grow smaller and smaller until it became a dark spot among the foaming breakers, and disappear.

In the saloon the missionaries sat around the table silently. Everything had been said about the Columbia Bar. Everything had been said about tides and cross-currents and breakers.

The steward came to the doorway with a sour face. "There's no water for soup."

"All right, François," Guizon said cheerfully. "Tomorrow night we shall eat in Astoria. Bring what you have."

The portions of rice and salt meat were very small. Sister Ursula wanted to ask for water but did not dare. She stared at the lantern swinging overhead. "It is the salt meat," she thought, "that makes it so hard. Just one swallow of water would be enough."

Once again after sunset a long line of fires burned along the coast. They were warm and cheerful like the lights of home. Father DeSmet, wrapped in a long black coat, was walking up and down the deck thoughtfully.

"Father Anthony," he said, "tomorrow, the day of our Holy Founder, we shall cross the bar. God would not send us out here to be destroyed. I am certain of that."

"Let us say five Masses in the morning," Ravalli suggested, "early, before the sunrise."

Early, before the sun rose, the Masses were said. It was as if they brought back the little boat with the four men. It was sighted at first only as a speck tumbling among white breakers, appearing and disappearing, rising on the ridges of the waves or sinking into a trough between them. The sailors did not lift their hands to wave. They sat huddled in the boat like dumb animals. When they drew near, a desperate silence settled upon the missionaries and the crew. Surely the men had brought them no good news.

The man with a wife and six children stood with his hands clutched in his beard, staring at the boat. "We haven't got enough food or water to make the Sandwich Islands . . ."

Guizon made a gesture as if to send him sprawling down the deck. Then, muttering an oath, he let his arm fall.

At last the boat drew up alongside the brig. One by one the men climbed on board, their dripping sou'westers sending little streams of water down the deck. Their heavy bodies heaved with weariness and their faces were deeply lined. Twenty pairs of anxious eyes stared into the face of each man as he boarded

the ship, and silence was taut to the breaking point. The last man shook the water from his coat, brushed the wet hair back from his face.

"We found the passage," he said wearily. "Not less than five fathoms and no snags."

A tremendous sigh of relief surged through the crowd.

"Get them some grog," Guizon commanded. The men stumbled to the cabins.

The crew sprang to the rigging. Under a light breeze the *Infatigable* once more cautiously advanced toward the mouth of the Columbia.

The nuns went to the saloon, and, falling on their knees, they prayed aloud: "Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women . . ." Over and over the same prayers from the motionless, humped, black figures.

Father DeSmet and Father Ravalli stood together on the deck watching the line of breakers come nearer and nearer until finally the great white waves were dashing about the ship's prow, beating the hull with fury.

"Seven fathoms!" the sounder called.

The ship moved slowly on. Soon they were surrounded by wild, white foam, on both sides, astern, and ahead, as far as they could see, a turbulent whirling froth, and the cross-current always pushing, pushing against the vessel.

"Six fathoms!" called the man in the chains.

Quietly the nuns came on board. Their faces were untroubled and confident. The prayers had brought them peace.

"Five fa . . . Four fathoms!" the strong, clear voice came again.

"What is your minimum draft?" Sister Bertha asked the captain.

"Three," Guizon said in a husky voice.

The turbulent water nullified their sense of progress. The brig seemed to be standing still, buffeted by the stormy waves. Sometimes one of the priests turned his back and, staring toward the masts, fingered his rosary while his lips moved in silent

prayer. Sometimes a sailor cursed loudly as he tugged at the ropes and, even as he cursed, made the sign of the cross.

"Three fathoms!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" The Frenchman with a wife and six children spat over the rail.

"Four fathoms!" A cheer from the deck drowned out the call. Captain Guizon scowled.

"We have two miles yet to go," he shouted, forcing their joy to silence.

They seemed to hang over the rail for an eternity. "Three fathoms."

Sister Bertha held tightly to Sister Agniet's hand.

"We are between life and death," a sailor muttered.

"And both are blessings," Sister Bertha added placidly.

"Two and a half!"

There was a movement toward the lifeboats, but Captain Guizon arrested it by a gesture of his hand. "She is a *passepourtout*," he thundered, "this *Infatigable!* Go ahead!"

The next cast of the lead showed four fathoms and the depth increased at every plunge until they heard the cry, "No bottom!"

The missionaries broke into a litany of gratitude. The crew sang their old Breton song. Joy was so great that no one could be quiet, and the two melodies made a discordant chaos of sound.

At four in the afternoon a canoe filled with men came toward the vessel. Captain Guizon signaled them to come on board.

The blond head of a burly man appeared. "My God!" he cried. "Do you know what you've done?" A moment later he was standing on the deck, laughter spread all over his face and his eyes twinkling with merriment. Three short, deformed, crooked-legged Indians stood beside him, their bodies exuding the rancid smell of fish oil. "I'm Reynolds, an American settler." The burly man held out his hand to Captain Guizon. "And my friends here are Clatsops. I say, do you know what you've done?"



The captain laughed. "We've crossed the Columbia Bar by some miracle."

"Crossed the Columbia Bar!" the American shouted. "You didn't come in the right way. The channel's way north, skirting Cape Disappointment. No vessel ever came in this far south—it's not navigable."

The unobtrusive Chinaman seemed to appear from nowhere. "You stand mid-channel," he repeated softly, "until the bluff most far east; then keep close around Cape Disappointment."

"That's right," the American said. "Why didn't you let that pigtail tell you?"

"We made it anyhow," Guizon said uncomfortably.

The American leaned against a stanchion. "Didn't you see our signals—the fires burned every night—and didn't you hear the cannon?"

"I did hear a cannon," Father DeSmet put in, "but we thought there was an Indian feast."

"When we saw you on the breakers I tried to come out but couldn't make it. We've had a bad three days on shore, sir, watching you flirt with death."

The French sailors were lighting their pipes, slapping one another on the back, and telling jokes.

The nuns looked triumphant. "It was God's will," Sister Bertha said, "to show us the wrong way, that He might have the glory of our deliverance."

Father DeSmet stood watching the Indians. They were dirty and miserable, foul-smelling and badly formed, but his heart twitched with the joy of beholding them.

## V

### A Medicine for Peace

1844-1846

#### I

Thus after two years Pierre Jean DeSmet was again in Oregon.

"Still fat and merry," Father Blanchet said, holding him by both hands and smiling into his face as if he could not get enough of the sunshine in the priest's eyes.

"Fat and merry, yes," DeSmet laughed, "with my hair as gray as the mantle of a herring gull. But Oregon has not changed—the same pale mists and moss-bearded trees."

"There you are wrong, *mon père*. Oregon has taken her first communion. You shall see."

Father DeSmet did see later, although he tarried near Fort Vancouver until October, choosing a site for St. Francis Xavier, as the mother-mission and residence of the superior was to be called. Then he fell sick from the bloody flux, which had already stricken the Chinoòks and Cascade Indians so that parties of them lay helpless along the river banks unable to reach the fort and obtain medical aid. Meanwhile, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur had opened their school. For six hours every day they taught the children prayers and catechism. As he lay in bed, watching from his window the tangled black heads gathering every day at the building which served as a convent, Father DeSmet would think, "They teach not only prayers and catechism, but the lesson of love." And weakly leaning back on his pillow, he would smile and fall asleep, to be wakened later by the sound of low voices and the scurrying of feet as the nuns, having dismissed their classes, set merrily to work paint-

ing the convent doors, glazing the windows, and awkwardly endeavoring to handle the plane.

In those days of convalescence Father DeSmet felt a warmth within him like the comfort of wine, for he was no longer alone, no longer one man in a vast territory, trying to realize an impossible dream with only two to help. He remembered how lonely he had felt the day Dr. McLoughlin had shown him the orchards of Hudson's Bay Company, orchards such as he had coveted for the Flatheads, and no one in St. Louis or on the plains had been able to understand or share his vision. Yet that very night he had quite inadvertently discovered, merely by the expression on their faces, that both the fur trader and Father Blanchet were eager to go down the road with him. Now he had become the captain of a small army of workers. While he was in Europe two priests and a lay brother, Father Peter de Vos, Father Adrian Hoecken, and Brother McGean, had gone into the Rocky Mountains. Altogether, eighteen of them. Why, more than the apostles of Jesus Christ! Under his pillow lay the great crucifix which he always wore. Taking it out, he held it to his lips and kissed it gently. "This will be a new world," he thought. "It matters not whether the territory in time belong to England or to the United States, for first of all it will belong to our Lord and blessed Saviour."

By October Father DeSmet was well enough to begin his long journey to the Flatheads. Going up the Columbia to Fort Walla Walla, he crossed the high plain between the Snake and Spokane Rivers. In his joy at being again under giant evergreens, encircled by snow-capped mountains, and day by day drawing nearer to his own people, he named all the rivers on the way with beautiful holy names that are now forgotten. The two streams which form the Coeur d'Alene Lake became St. Ignatius and St. Joseph. Their four main branches he baptized Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and all the Catholic hierarchy of the United States was remembered in the various mountain streams he passed. Finally he gave the names of the Venerables of the Company of Jesus to forty-eight little lakes lying at the

base of the Cascade Mountains. Migratory swans, geese, and ducks had covered them like snow, and when one of the guides fired his gun, an innumerable multitude of birds rose in a mass so that the beating of their wings resembled the rumble of an earthquake. "So many are the white-robed guardian angels of the new Catholics," the missionary thought fancifully.

Father Adrian Hoecken had already begun St. Ignatius' Mission in the Bay of the Kalispels, an extensive prairie lying on the north side of Pend d'Oreille River, about forty miles above its junction with the Columbia. It was a white plain covered with sagebrush and rimmed by mountains where red chokecherries hung like clusters of rubies, and the elderberries made dark blue waterfalls along the rocks.

"I hope you will not be disappointed," the Hollander said as he embraced DeSmet. "With me you may find fault, for I am slow and clumsy in my work; but the Indians, they are saints."

"It is beautiful here," Father DeSmet said.

"We must move before snow melts in the mountains," Hoecken explained. "Every year this whole valley is flooded. Tomorrow I will show you where we are going."

Father DeSmet found the life of the Pend d'Oreille Indians much like that of the Flatheads. As yet no buildings had been constructed and no land plowed. The morning following his arrival Mass was celebrated under the trees.

That afternoon he and Father Hoecken rode among greasewood and aloes toward the mountains.

"You will see the Grotto of Manresa," Father Hoecken said suddenly, as they turned their horses into a deep valley. Manresa was a town in Catalonia where Loyola had lived for a year, fasting and doing penance.

By the time they had reached the grotto the afternoon sun had already slipped behind the hills. Gray shale and slate jutted out from the mountainside in sharp, deep ridges. Scarlet rosehaws and mauve-colored vines made a tangled garland of color over the entrance. The two men dismounted and entered. The



grotto was so dark that Father DeSmet could get no clear notion of its size.

"It seems very large," he remarked, wondering at the echo of his voice.

"It is a miracle," the other murmured, "a miracle. At a small expense it can be fitted into a church big enough to hold all the Pend d'Oreilles." He took DeSmet's arm gently. "Father, we are poor, so God even gives us our cathedral. You can see how beautiful it is. At the farther end, where we would place the altar, is a copper deposit of deep blue-green, as lovely in its way as the rose window of Amiens."

"Copper?" Father DeSmet asked sharply. "How do you know it is copper?"

"When I was a child my father took me on a trip to Spain. I saw mines there. Why do you ask?"

They were standing once again outside in the blue shadow of early night. DeSmet studied the North Star in silence. Then he turned slowly to Father Hoecken. "Share this grotto only with the Pend d'Oreilles," he said firmly. "Never tell anyone that there is copper here. You must keep your secret as I have kept mine about gold."

"Gold!" Father Hoecken cried.

"Yes, gold. There's lots of it in these mountains, and its discovery will mean the end of Christianity, the end of God."

As autumn advanced Father DeSmet grew more eager to reach the Flatheads, but before he could leave, men appeared from the Coeur d'Alenes. "You have no reason to be pleased with us," they said. "Some of us have done very wrong. But we ask only one thing, that you come yourself and say whether the Coeur d'Alenes love you as you would have them."

"Be patient, my Flatheads," the priest thought to himself, "and the Lord keep you."

He followed the Coeur d'Alene guides toward the Sacred Heart Mission, where Father Point had already built half a dozen cabins and cultivated three hundred acres of ground. The passage was difficult, and on the second day snow and rain came driving into the faces of the missionary and his companions.

The horses slid and stumbled at almost every step along the winding path that led down steep declivities, between tall red pines and little clumps of spruce. They reached the mission in a driving blizzard.

## 2

One morning in the spring of 1845, as the Flatheads were leaving their chapel after Mass, Father DeSmet rode into St. Mary's Mission of the Bitter Root Valley. Father Mengarini, who was standing in the doorway of the church, disappeared, and a moment later the joyful cry of the bell rang through the settlement. Shouting, waving their arms, kicking the dogs from under their feet, the Indians rushed down the road. Father DeSmet caught sight of Tchata stumbling along heavily in an effort to keep up with the others. Tears streamed down her face. As Mina-Yougha ran forward, the red cape fell from her shoulders and was trampled in the dust. Men roughly pushed the women out of their way. The valley was alive with swarming Indians. Then the priest was jerked from his horse. Someone jammed his hat upon a long pole and lifted it high over the crowd. A shout ran across the hills, "The Blackrobe, the Blackrobe has come back!"

Francis Xavier stood looking into the priest's face. "Twice we suffered the long winter and you did not come. We prayed every day. They told us the big waters beyond the mountains might have swallowed you."

Father DeSmet was unconscious that he had his arm around Ignace and was drawing the scarred, brown face of the Indian close against his own. He knew only that he was happier than he had ever been before. "Ah, Francis, I promised you I would come back, and God helped me." He glanced over the crowd carefully, noting the old, familiar faces and the new ones of children he had not seen before. "Where is Old Simon?"

Pilchimo had joined the group. "He died during the big snow. He asked for you and Father Mengarini went to him. Old Simon could not see, and we let him think you had come back."

Tchata had shoved her way timidly among the men, and

now she pulled at the priest's cassock. "Father, do you remember Tchata?"

Father DeSmet pushed the greasy black hair back from the woman's face. "I would never forget one of the bravest of my friends. Tchata, have you forgiven me?"

"God has forgiven me, Father, and I have found peace."

Laughing and crying at once, Mengarini made his way through the crowd. His tangled curls were disheveled. "Padre, Padre, God bless you!"

Still holding Ignace tight against him, DeSmet clasped Father Mengarini with his other arm. Suddenly he burst into tears like a child, sobbing against the Italian's shoulder. A hush fell upon the Flatheads. Their seamed, leather faces were drawn into that peculiar expression which denotes both joy and sorrow. Ignace stroked the long, gray hair that fell over the missionary's shoulders. It was dry and dead like that of an old man. Father DeSmet looked up.

"Father, many of our men are not here today," Ignace said.

"Isn't it early for the spring hunt?" the priest asked.

"They are not hunting, Father. The Blackfeet have killed them."

DeSmet turned to Mengarini. The Italian said nothing, but his eyes confirmed the Indian's statement.

Francis Xavier was leading the priest's horse by the bridle as the Indians slowly moved toward the settlement. "They are driving our buffalo away. Soon we shall starve."

"We shall be a tribe of widows and orphans," Mina-Yougha said.

Father DeSmet studied the crowd again. Yes, the women far outnumbered the men. "Wistilpo is gone?" he asked.

"Yes, Father, and Gabriel Prudhomme died with six arrows in his breast. The Blackfeet swept down like a pack of wolves."

Father Mengarini walked with his eyes fixed on the ground.

As they drew near the little church, DeSmet sighed. "I will go to find the Blackfeet," he said.

"No! You will die!" Ignace cried.

Father Mengarini blanched. "It is for me to go, Father Pierre."

"No, your place is here," DeSmet said, shaking his head. "My feet were made to wear out these mountains. I visited the Coeur d'Alenes before coming here and talked with Father Nicholas. He tells me that no one could have done more than you have in these two years that I have spent toughening my muscles with travel."

"If all of us cannot withstand the Blackfeet, Father, what can one man do?" Pilchimo asked.

"You have come back. Do not leave us again," Mina-Yougha complained. "Let us all die together; then no one will be left to mourn."

"I will go to find the Blackfeet," Father DeSmet insisted, "and I will come back to you, as I have come before."

The Indians looked at one another sheepishly, knowing that the priest would need two guides. Ignace moved forward to speak, but Mina-Yougha's arm drew him back. They had reached the chapel. The men stood uncomfortably around the priests, each waiting for one of the others to speak.

"Whom will you take with you?" Father Mengarini asked.

Father DeSmet smiled with a sadness that betrayed his disappointment at the Indians' reluctance. "I will go to Fort Colville and hire two guides."

"We are dogs!" Francis Xavier shouted in shame. "I am not afraid of the Blackfeet, Father."

"Do you think that guides hired from another tribe would die for us?" Pilchimo asked. "Francis and I have gone over the mountains with you. We go with you again."

That night DeSmet lay in his bed wearily thinking of the new journey. In a way, he felt like a horse whipped to its labor beyond endurance. He had hoped to stay a little while in the Bitter Root Valley before setting out for the Blackfoot country. He had wanted to say Mass in the chapel which he had helped to build, to enter once more into the joys and sorrows of his people. "Yet the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head," he thought, abashed at his weakness.



Not until midsummer, however, did the missionary and his two Flathead guides at last ride through the gap in the mountains and turn their horses northward. In spite of their apparent gaiety, each man knew that perhaps he had seen the Bitter Root Valley for the last time.

## 3

In the hush of an August afternoon they reached the dark evergreen forest which skirts Lake Pend d'Oreille. Far off echoed the great noise of a moose splashing among lily pads. It had rained recently, and the forest floor was broken by ghost-plants, half-awakened, the pine needles still hiding their humped white heads.

Father DeSmet reined his horse in sharply. An unexpected thud of hoofs in the distance had sent a mountain jay crying across the conifer-drenched air. "Francis!"

The Indian turned his head quickly, like a startled deer. "They aren't far away," he said.

The whole forest was instantly alert. A black bear plunged clumsily among huckleberry bushes. A muskrat splashed into the water. An otter slid upon his belly among the reeds. A porcupine gnawing the branches of a pine tree sat motionless with erect quills and forepaws clutching the bough.

Touching his mare lightly, the priest continued down the path in the direction from which the noise of hoof-beats had come. The Indians trailed behind him. The path followed the lake for a quarter of a mile and then turned into the woods again and went down a hill to the edge of a small river. Here the men dismounted to drink. Pilchimo knelt down and put his face in the cool water. His coarse hair fell over his shoulders and lay on the surface like dead black scum. Then he flung his head back, staring into a break among the willows on the opposite shore.

"Father," he whispered, "they come!"

A moment later the willows swayed, and a train of horses appeared in single file. The little man in front, thin-legged, fat-bellied, sat his pony like a king, in spite of his tattered clothing and the slouch hat that nearly concealed his wind-bitten face.

The two who followed him wore the scarlet jackets of the British army. They rode stiffly and kept their animals moving somewhat too fast for the half-breed in hide leggings and flowing hair, who managed half a dozen pack animals.

"Father DeSmet!" the fat-bellied man shrieked from the opposite bank of the river. "You're more welcome than a buffalo on the plains."

DeSmet laughed. "I return the compliment, but you are all hat and no face."

The other man whipped his horse into the water.

"Peter Skeen Ogden!" the priest cried. "Wherever I go Hudson's Bay Company has a surprise for me. Two years or three, has it been? God bless you!"

"What are you doing this far north?" the fur trader asked.

"I think it's time for the Kootenais to see a priest. And after that, God willing, I'm going to find the Blackfeet."

"If you go after the Blackfeet, Father, you'll not come back. It's death!"

Father DeSmet had not heard him. He was looking at the officers. They made a gay picture as they crossed the river on their horses, their scarlet jackets flaming against the green background of trees. But the priest's face was perplexed. "Ogden, I see you're bringing the British army with you. By the way, do you know my guides? Pilchimo and Francis Xavier, both Flat-heads."

Ogden's companions now joined the group. "Father DeSmet, Lieutenant Warre and Lieutenant Vavasour. We've come from the Red River Settlement."

"And you are going to Fort Vancouver?" Father DeSmet asked, wondering why he should be troubled by the officers.

"We are," the fur trader replied. "Have you been there lately?"

"In the spring."

"I haven't heard any news for a long time," Ogden said. "Are your Americans still asking for fifty-four forty?"

DeSmet observed the officers closely. They sat upon their horses like wooden men, with flat, expressionless faces. All at

once the truth dawned on him. These men were going to Vancouver about the boundary dispute. His blue eyes stared Ogden squarely in the face. "I know nothing about politics," he remarked. "A missionary never does."

The fur trader chuckled. "Father DeSmet, that is the most innocent lie I have ever heard a priest tell."

"It is the only kind of lie a priest may tell, Ogden, the kind that fools no one."

Ogden turned to the lieutenants. "Pierre Jean DeSmet," he explained, "is the most influential man in Oregon. We must keep him friendly to Great Britain, for at a word from him all the Indians in the mountains would rise up and fight."

DeSmet slapped Ogden on the back. "That word is one I shall never speak. If Great Britain is like Hudson's Bay Company, I have no reason to quarrel with her."

"Père DeSmet," Lieutenant Vavasour said suddenly, "you speak English like a Frenchman."

"Even as you," the priest replied. "I am a naturalized American. But England sends a small army out to conquer so vast a country. Just two men? She does not take the States seriously. Where will you raise your flag, my friends?"

The officers flushed with anger, but Ogden burst into laughter. "We are on a secret mission, Father, a secret mission. We even fooled the men at Fort Edmonton. But you—you bore into one's brains without mercy. If it weren't for your damned sense of honor, we'd kill you for a spy. But one more secret won't make your brains burst."

Lieutenant Warre spoke up. "I say, Ogden, who is this priest that you tell him our affairs?"

"A man who knows them already, Warre. Father DeSmet won't mind if the British flag flies over Cape Disappointment. But be good to his savages."

"Cape Disappointment is of just one use to England," Father DeSmet said, "to control the river mouth in case of war. This is a fight, Ogden, that should be waged in Washington across a table."

Bored by the conversation, Pilchimo and Francis Xavier

had taken off their hide coats and were bathing in the river. Father DeSmet watched them. "It's their country," he added slowly. "They alone have a right to it and they alone are not consulted."

The officers were becoming impatient. Lieutenant Vavasour pulled the collar of his jacket closer about his neck. His face turned frigid.

"You are troubled," the priest said to him pleasantly, "and vexed because I have discovered your secret mission. That is nothing. Every priest carries a bundle of secrets, you know, and he never spills any of them. I am not interested in politics."

Ogden leaned forward over the neck of his horse. "Father, there is a little misunderstanding at the Red River Settlement about McLoughlin. You can do Hudson's Bay Company a service in that respect—wherever you go, a kind word about the doctor, that he is gracious to the Yankees, but that he would die for England."

"Which is the truth," DeSmet answered. "I will do what I can."

He watched the Britishers ride into the forest until the last bit of scarlet had disappeared among the trees. The sudden meeting with Ogden disturbed him. As they continued their way the Flatheads found the priest unusually preoccupied. They were following a narrow path half-hidden among tall bracken. Four years earlier Father DeSmet would have found no trail across these mountains and have met no white man. That alone was enough to trouble him. Furthermore, he understood more than he had admitted about the political situation. He knew that the United States was claiming title to the country by reason of her settlers and attempting to strengthen that claim by urging more American families to make their homes in Oregon. When he saw how the white men had debauched the Indians along the Missouri River, the priest knew that they had invaded and plundered a country which was not theirs. Now as he viewed the possibility of white settlements in Oregon, he felt that they were about to invade the Kingdom of God. Yet he was still confident that the western mountains would remain wilderness



forever, still certain that his Indians would never meet corruption, or disease, or drunkenness. Already the missions were thrusting their roots into the land, the Catholic Church was spreading her branches out like a tree, and the natives were begging for her shade. No, the Flatheads, he knew, would never meet the fate of the Potawatomis.

The horses had been wandering through a forest obstructed by fallen trees. Now they entered a frightful slough where cranberries made a feathery mat over the ground to trap their mounts, and monkey flowers stood rose-red above the green. The priest scarcely noticed how his animal floundered deep in mire, until he saw Pilchimo waiting for him a short distance ahead.

"Father," the Indian said as the priest drew near, "I do not like so many white men in our land. They are sharp like lynxes."

"Yes, they are sharp like lynxes," Father DeSmet agreed, "but God will take care of us all."

## 4

They crawled over avalanche-swept slopes covered with dense alder-slides, where the old boughs lay level with the ground and younger branches shot up higher than a man's head, forming a maze that even the ax could not subdue. They rode across bare moraines left naked by receding glaciers. They wandered lost through black forests, the columns of larch and Douglas fir lifting high above them a dome of impenetrable boughs. And when dwarf dogwood, creeping raspberries, and ferns covered whatever trail had once been made, they let their horses wander at will, trusting them to follow in the track of other animals. Fearful, unfathomable chasms seemed to open at their feet, and the roar of rushing waterfalls and whirlpools engulfing the crags swallowed their voices when they chose to call to one another. In this world of monstrous size, Father DeSmet felt strange and lost, only reassured by an occasional flock of bluebirds flashing against the deep black seams of yellow pine,

or by red and purple spindle-trees that burned a moment in some cuplike valley as they caught the sun.

Creeping upon hands and knees along steep roofs of quartz and shelves of dark slate, far up on bleak, wind-swept ledges between timberline and spires of everlasting snow, they could see mountain goats dancing from crag to crag, or sheep bowed down by their heavy horns.

Even in moments of terror, when a sudden rustle in a thicket of devil's-club might have meant a Blackfoot, a puma, or nothing but a white-tailed deer, Father DeSmet felt a strange, adventurous gladness like that which he had known as a child playing among the fishing boats at night when he had suddenly stared into the face of a lean, unshaven man whose threatening voice and raised, clenched fist had sent him tumbling against masts and coils of rope and lobster pails and at last running down the dark streets of Termonde to his home.

"*C'est terrible!*" the priest thought. "The deserts will wither a man and leave him indolent under a hard shell like the Root-diggers. The plains will make him fleet as the antelope and his eyes will take on the sharpness of stars that no trees hide. Such are the Sioux. But the mountain tribes are humble because long before they kissed the crucifix they saw God's hands molding the mountain crags." All at once it seemed to Father DeSmet that sometime in the twilight of their past the quiet, mystical tribes of the mountains had fashioned a deity in the image of frightful canyons and terrifying precipices, which was the only image they knew—a God in many ways akin to that of the Hebrews, characterized by fear and wrath. That image had made them meek. But the other God, the Christian God, the babe in the stable, the boy saying wise words to the temple men had come to them like the gentians in a mountain meadow and had made them gay. They had not wanted the tragic, inscrutable Saviour of the Protestant preachers, the Christ of Golgotha and the crucifixion. But the Jesus of the Catholics, who forever remains a child in His mother's lap, they could love tenderly and strive to please.

Day after day slipped by monotonously. Sometimes the

men slept upon mountain slopes in the fragrance of balsam fir, sometimes among the lemon-yellow aspens where the hills were low and dry.

"I think there are no Indians," Father DeSmet remarked one afternoon. "For ten days we have not seen the hoof-print of a horse or the ashes of one dead fire." His cassock was torn by brambles, his hands scarred red, and his face streaked with scratches so that he resembled a monk who had gone into the woods to mortify himself.

Francis Xavier answered him affectionately. "Father, we will find Indians soon."

Before nightfall, following a mountain stream, they came upon a grove of birches from which the bark had been peeled; and the naked trunks were painted scarlet.

"There are dead here," the Flatheads said. "Tomorrow we shall find the Kootenais."

That night they tied their horses deep in a grove of willows. They did not light a fire, but ate berries and a raw ptarmigan which Pilchimo had killed that morning. Then, murmuring their prayers, they fell asleep.

The next day their path wound among small, deciduous trees into a clearing. The three men drew rein. They were at the edge of a meadow walled in by snow-capped mountains and blue hills. Women were gathering camas roots. Bending over to dig their crooked sticks into the earth, they neither saw nor heard the intruders. They worked mutely without lifting their faces to the sun, as if, having been so long at their labor, they had lost either the need or the ability to stand erect. Rhythmically they extracted the onion-like bulbs from the ground, tossing them into baskets of split roots.

"Kootenais," Pilchimo whispered.

When the men rode slowly into the meadow, the squaws, startled by the sound of hoofs, stood up. Then they became tall, strong women, hard-faced and haughty. They replied to the priest's sign of friendship and approached gravely, for, in fact, the Kootenais never smile. Living in the certainty of death, their features have a cold, settled melancholy not characteristic

of other tribes. With some difficulty it was made clear to them that the Blackrobe and his companions were seeking the camp. The women pointed beyond the valley through a gap between the hills, and one stepped forward, offering to lead them.

"It is far," Father DeSmet said to Pilchimo. "Give her a horse that she may ride."

The Flatheads quickly removed the baggage from one of the pack animals and led the pony out for the squaw to mount. A little fearfully she approached, touched it, and then withdrew, shaking her head.

"Father, they have no horses. She cannot ride," Pilchimo explained.

The party crossed the camas prairie and disappeared through the gap. From there the trail descended a steep incline so that the men were forced to dismount and crawl upon their hands and knees. But the Kootenai woman walked erect with as much ease as a mountain goat, showing a slight disdain for these clumsy men moving on all fours as awkwardly as bears. Finally the path turned off abruptly across a hill, at the foot of which, on the opposite side, huddled the village of grass-thatched huts.

From a distance there appeared to be no sign of life. The lodges resembled a colony of abandoned giant anthills. The woman pointed to them and without friendliness or cheer turned away and began retracing the path. Father DeSmet watched her strong, broad back until she vanished.

"They are not friendly," he said to the Flatheads.

Francis Xavier shrugged his shoulders. "Father, the Kootenais are stern like mountain rocks."

"We shall see," the priest replied half to himself, and touching the flank of his mare, he started down the hill, keeping some distance ahead of his companions.

The dead stillness of the village did not change as they approached. No noisy dogs rushed out to tease the hocks of their ponies. No horses grazed on the yellow meadow grass. As he rode among the deserted lodges, the priest noted that they were



very clean. Bones and bits of broken pottery had been carefully piled up and pushed to one side.

"There is no one," he said, perplexed. But the words were scarcely out of his mouth when he caught sight of three old men sitting cross-legged on the ground, gambling, apparently so blind and deaf they had at first been unaware of the intruders. One of the old men managed to get to his feet by pulling on the shoulders of his decrepit companions. He too was tall in spite of his age, clean, and melancholy.

"Blackrobe!" he said in English, coming forward. "Blackrobe! Blackrobe!"

At the sound of his voice some squaws crept hesitatingly from the holes of their huts, like timid rabbits. One of them was a Salish woman. Recognizing the Flatheads, she spoke to them in their own language. "We are old and about to die. We have waited long for you, Blackrobe."

The old men who had gathered about the priest stared at him with childish interest. Meanwhile the Salish woman explained that the entire tribe except the squaws on the camas plain had gone to fish, for on the following day was to occur the annual ceremony of the fish festival.

That night Father DeSmet slept in a hut fragrant with balsam fir. When he wakened in the morning a young man stood by him. He too had a face stoically austere. In his hand he held some bunches of cedar chips divided into small bundles of different sizes. He offered them to the priest. "Blackrobe, such are the number of my sins. These, the men I have killed. Count them. These are my thefts. And these my lusts."

Outside the hut the Indians who had returned from their fishing trip waited to confess. They had hoped for a Blackrobe for many months, and had kept fervently the few religious exercises they had learned from neighboring tribes. It was nearly noon when Father DeSmet left the lodge and discovered the village alive with Indians making ready for the fish festival. The squaws, although not privileged to attend, were carrying firewood and kettles into a long, low hut made of rush mats.

Pilchimo drew the priest aside. "Be careful, Father, when

you eat the fish," he warned. "If you break a bone you bring evil upon the tribe."

It was a strange thing for the priest to watch these solemn preparations, done without gaiety and almost without noise. It was still more strange to find himself seated in the hovel before a fire fifty feet long, partially overlaid with stones, and all around him the dimly illuminated, dark, stern faces of the savages. When the chief arose and began speaking in the Kootenai dialect, Father DeSmet tried to examine by the light of the fire the kettle and two sticks which had been given to him as well as to each of the other guests. The sticks were flattened at one end. The kettle was made of osier, cemented with gum, and filled with water and fish. The chief finished his speech and stood with his arms lifted toward heaven, and the guttural tones of his voice became even deeper and more quiet. That was the prayer. Soon all the Kootenais, using their sticks as tongs, were lifting stones from the fire. Father DeSmet reached forward and attempted to pick up one of the hot stones, but it slipped from the grasp of his sticks. He tried a second time and failed. Then Francis Xavier leaned over. Without a word he drew two stones from the embers and dropped them into the priest's kettle. A moment later the fish had been cooked. The Indians sat in profound silence as they ate, their fingers trembling lest they falter. When the feast was over the bare bones were spread out. Each man examined those of his neighbor. None was broken. The chief rose. The Kootenais followed him, and they gravely left the hut.

"The Great Spirit has favored us," a Kootenai said to Father DeSmet. "He will bring us no evil, for the bones were kept whole."

In the evening they raised a cross on the border of a little lake and sang canticles to the Holy Virgin.

Later, when Father DeSmet and the two Flatheads lay in their buffalo robes trying to sleep, Pilchimo sat up. "Father, are you awake?"

"Yes, Pilchimo."

"Do you believe it would bring them evil to break a fish bone?"

"No, Pilchimo."

"Why did you not tell them?"

For a little while Father DeSmet said nothing, then, "When I came to the Flatheads, did I teach you all the prayers at once, or did I teach you only one or two?"

"You taught us three prayers, Father, that we might tell our beads."

"And after that?"

"You taught us one prayer every day."

"And that is what I wish to do with the Kootenais. They must learn a little at a time. That is how you teach your children. First, to ride a horse; then later to use the bow and arrow; and finally, when they are old and wise enough, to hunt buffalo."

Pilchimo lay down again. "I understand. But, Father, if you had broken a bone, they might have killed you."

The priest laughed. "But I didn't," he said. "Go to sleep."

## 5

In September multitudes of salmon flashed through the waters of the upper Columbia, cut and mutilated by rocks under cataracts and waterfalls during their long pilgrimage from the sea. The three men who had traveled far north were also bleeding and weary. They had reached a high, cold pocket of green where the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan River rise but a few miles apart, diverging to meet again on their way to the Atlantic. Close between them sleeps one of the lakes from which the Columbia flows down to the Pacific. And not far away, lost among dazzling glaciers, rises the Athabasca, which joins the Mackenzie River and moves onward to the Arctic Sea.

During their months in the mountains the priest's hair had grown long and hung over his shoulders. His face, rugged with deep brown seams, had become ancient, as enduring and as gnarled as the rocky world through which he traveled. In the morning he would waken with hope in his heart that they might find the Blackfeet that day. At night he would fall asleep fa-

tigued and discouraged, dreaming of the thousands of canyons and valleys and chasms where a band of Indians might wander for years and not be found.

On the shore of Bow River, however, they discovered an abandoned camp. After Pilchimo and Francis had examined it carefully, they crossed themselves and uttered the dreaded word "Blackfeet." That afternoon they moved toward two funnels of smoke that rose, far off, from the northern end of a long valley and spread in blue mist, as if caught among the boughs of giant evergreens upon the mountainside. The Flatheads became less talkative. They lagged behind Father DeSmet, gloomy and sullen. Once the priest had to draw rein and wait for them.

"Our journey will soon be at an end," he said eagerly as the Indians rode up to him.

"Our journey in this world, yes," Pilchimo replied sadly.

Father DeSmet laughed. "Pilchimo, put your confidence in God."

The Indian brushed the hair from his face and began twisting the mane of his horse with nervous fingers. "Father, I had a dream last night. I was devoured by a wild bear."

"We go to death!" Francis Xavier said gravely. "I too dreamed. I saw you, Father, sleeping on a narrow ledge of rock. Ravens and vultures were hovering over your head."

The priest frowned. "Do your dreams always give you warning of what will happen?"

"Sometimes."

"Only sometimes," DeSmet mused. "Perhaps you dreamed because you fear the Blackfeet."

"Father, we both dreamed. That is bad."

Father DeSmet became silent. He felt that he was groping in the dark.

Francis Xavier's black eyes held an emotion which was not fear, a melancholy resignation perhaps. "When we come back I will have a son. If not, my squaw must suckle an orphan. She cannot teach him to throw the spear."

Pilchimo pressed his lips together in anger. "A Flathead does not feel sorry for himself or for his sons. Let the wolves suckle



your babe if you would make him a man. We stay with you, Father, even with Blackfoot arrows in our breasts."

The melancholy in Francis Xavier's eyes deepened to shame. "Pray for me, Father. I am fawn-hearted."

Ever since that morning when Francis had courageously given up the Hawaiian girl, Father DeSmet had loved him. Now he smiled indulgently. The touch of his hand could not have been more caressing than that smile. "You are both good Christians," he said, "Pilchimo facing danger boldly like Jesus when he drove the bad men from the temple, and you, Francis, thinking of your son, like Jesus loving both babes and little lambs."

Yet even as he spoke, fear crept into the Jesuit's heart. At the trading posts he had heard many tales of how the Blackfeet rush upon white men without warning and, having tortured and killed them, leave their bodies to the wolves. Perhaps it was a mad journey to ride thus into certain danger. "I overvalue myself," he thought. "Without me the work will go on, but unless there is peace between the Blackfeet and the Flatheads, the mission will be destroyed."

For three days they followed the tracks of the Indians, observing by remnants of fires they passed that they were slowly gaining upon their enemies. On the fourth day Pilchimo cried, "Assiniboin!" thanking God that they had not yet found the men they were seeking.

Their trail coiled back in the form of a horseshoe tipped at an angle, so that while the men were riding north, the Indians were passing south some thirty feet below them. They were a cluster of small, misshapen women, with painted cheeks and red earth sprinkled in their hair. Bent forward under the weight of children on their backs, they were dragging others behind them, and at the same time, with whips and hoarse cries, were urging on a long file of lean, starved dogs so overloaded with provisions they were passing blood.

"The men go ahead to hunt," Pilchimo explained. "They camp together at night."

The women turned another bend in the path and disappeared. Then, just as Father DeSmet wheeled his horse about, he

saw on the trail below an old hag limping painfully. She had been trying to keep pace with the others and, judging by the breathless manner in which she puffed at her pipe, was losing ground. Her thin hair was twisted into a knot at the top of her head and held together with red porcupine quills. Her face was streaked with blood, a sign of mourning. As Father DeSmet paused a moment, curiously looking down upon her, she lifted her eyes and saw him. She screamed, raising a scrawny, mutilated hand on which only three fingers remained. Instantly the other women reappeared, running back to see what had happened. The one English word they knew, "Blackrobe," rang through the air. They pointed out an opening through the brush by which the priest might ride down to them without following the bend in the trail. The three men urged their horses down it, Pilchimo and Francis taking the lead.

For a number of days Father DeSmet and the Flatheads traveled with the Assiniboins. At night they surrounded their tents with boughs of trees to keep the dogs away. So great was the hunger of the hounds that they devoured everything within reach, but the hunger of the Indians was still greater. One chief confessed that the preceding winter he had been forced to consume successively his wife and four children. The filth of this band of natives was unendurable. Even the Flatheads turned away in disgust when the Assiniboins took off their greasy leather shirts swarming with vermin and carved the meat upon them. The squaw who served DeSmet with a wooden bowl of soup licked the grease from the horn spoon she gave him; and when the last dish of pulverized ants, grasshoppers, and locusts had been consumed, the men wiped their dirty hands in their hair.

The morning Father DeSmet and his companions parted from the Assiniboins the cold autumn air was ice against their eyelids. As they rode east, the mountains decreased and evergreens climbed to their summits like rows of marching men. Then all the ranges melted together in an undulating mass beyond which stretched a treeless level plain. In this boundless Canadian prairie, with the Chinook winds behind them, Blackfeet and

Crows, Snakes, Aricaras, Cheyennes, and Sioux wandered summer and winter hunting the buffalo.

Sometimes the priest could feel the earth vibrate beneath him and could see in the distance a herd of wild horses that, having scented the travelers, was fleeing in terror. Sometimes they passed over wide stretches of plain burned black by the bloodthirsty warring tribe they sought. Then the animals grew thin from lack of grass; and the dry gulches could offer them no water.

They came at last to the swampy valley of the Saskatchewan, where water birds flew out of tall, coarse grass and a mist dripped all morning through the air. Wooded country lay beyond. Already the birches and aspens had shed their leaves, making a brown, soggy carpet for the horses' feet, and red berries nodded lightly on naked underbrush. Father DeSmet knew that the north fork of the river must be near. He let the reins lie loosely over the back of his pony, feeling a new security, for the willow thickets well concealed them and Rocky Mountain House, the fur trading post, could not be far away. Pilchimo rode ahead, his goatskin robe pulled high over his shoulders to meet the edge of his fur cap, on which two buffalo horns were fastened like rabbit's ears. Suddenly the Indian drew his horse up by the mane. At the same moment the mare neighed loud in fear. She reared, then, whirling about, rushed past the others with bared teeth and whited eyes. A moment later Pilchimo had brought her to a stop. Now the priest's pony snorted and pawed the ground with rebellious hoofs; and the pack animals, shoving against one another, tore down the trail.

"It is the death smell," the Indian cried.

As he slid from his horse, Francis leaned over and caught the mane of the priest's pony, drawing her flank against the body of his own animal, which was cavorting in the path. Pilchimo followed the track a short distance, cautiously and without noise, his nostrils dilated like those of a stag sniffing the wind. Then he disappeared among the trees. When he returned he said briefly, "A Cree Woman. She hung herself. The vultures have been there. Bad smell."

Francis gathered the pack animals together, and now they permitted the horses to cut into the woods, making a wide circle around the dead body.

By nightfall they had reached Rocky Mountain House, a formidable group of buildings with pickets twice as high as those at Fort Vancouver, and close against them the blazing scarlet and white tepees of the Crees. Men with hideous vermilion faces and tattooed bodies and women whose chins were disfigured by blue lines running from the corners of their mouths glared sullenly at the strangers as they rode by. Although it was late, trading had not yet ceased, and a group of natives crowded about two portholes opening through the stockade into a small block-house. Dried and pounded meat, cakes and bladders of grease, buffalo hides, dressed leather, and wolfskins were shoved through those portholes; but all that came out of them were glasses of rum.

The Indians who were drinking were in high spirits, laughing loudly and pushing against one another in their eagerness to force their way to the opening.

Father DeSmet knocked at the south gate. The French *engagé* who peered through the grating was startled. He peered into a pair of blue eyes and a broad Flemish face set in a frame of long, disheveled gray hair. That face had been scratched by brambles, there was a black and blue mark on the left cheek, and one eye was swollen shut. The little Frenchman stretched himself to his tiptoes and stared down through the grating.

"*Ah, vous êtes prêtre!*" he exclaimed when he saw the tattered cassock and crucifix. At once the door was unbarred.

Father DeSmet found himself face to face with a typical Canadian *voyageur*, a little man with long arms and undeveloped legs, wearing a scarlet handkerchief at his neck and a green sash around his waist.

"You should have taken the north gate, *mon père*, but you can get in through here." The *engagé* closed the door in the faces of the two Flatheads, slid the heavy bar into place, and fastened the bolt.

"Those Indians are with me," the priest explained.



"*Quel dommage!*" the *engagé* replied. "Priests, *mon père*, are always welcome, but we allow no natives inside, except in this passage for the first two drinks." They stood in a narrow corridor where a number of Crees sat smoking the calumet and drinking rum. There were no windows and at either end the doors were barred. The *engagé* led Father DeSmet past the men and unfastened a door opening into the fort.

"Mr. Harriote, I understand, is the commander," the priest said. "I wish to see him."

"Mr. Harriote is ill. He has been ill a long time, but he receives callers."

The officers' houses, general trading shops, and stores were built in the form of a square, all of them heavily bolted and with grille work at the windows. They reminded Father DeSmet of a bleak European prison.

"You are well fortified," he said to his guide.

"We need to be," was the quick reply. "We trade with the Blackfeet. Mr. Harriote lives here, *mon père*. Pull the bell and you will be taken care of."

They stood before a large log building, substantially built. The dark, lean pines surrounding it and the ground carpeted with dead needles gave the house an air of desolation.

Father DeSmet pulled the bell. An eye appeared at a knot-hole in the door. It stared a long time, so long that the priest wondered if he should speak. Then the door opened a crack, and by a succession of small jerks was finally pulled wide. In the opening stood a half-breed woman with a round moonlike face and frightened eyes. Under her right arm she held a baby whose tiny fingers clutched her red calico skirt.

"Harriote, he sick," she said in a husky voice, replying to the priest's inquiry.

"Tell him Pierre Jean DeSmet, a friend of Dr. McLoughlin, wishes to see him."

"Yah. Pee-air—what you say?" the woman asked, confused.

"Pierre Jean DeSmet, a friend of Dr. McLoughlin."

The woman hunched the child higher on her hip. "Pee-air—" she repeated and stood stupidly helpless a second time.

"It is a hard name," the priest admitted, smiling at her.

The woman returned his smile, becoming less timid. "The name no matter. I tell him Blackrobe. That is enough."

When he was alone Father DeSmet looked about him. The walls of the room were covered with hides, and two large bearskins lay over the floor. The furniture was made of rough timbers and most of it was drawn close to the fireplace as if the master suffered perpetual chills from the northern winds. On the table stood some empty bottles of rum, unwashed glasses, and a number of ill-smelling pipes. Yellow dust coated the uncovered parts of the floor.

The woman re-entered the room as noiselessly as a cat. She watched the priest curiously a moment. Then she said, "He see you. Come."

They groped their way down a dark hallway into a bedroom. J. E. Harriote, Commander of Rocky Mountain House, lay in bed. Although a brisk fire burned in the hearth, a number of woolen blankets were drawn high under his arms, and his florid English face smiled at the priest above a soiled gray flannel gown.

"I am Pierre Jean DeSmet," the priest said, holding out his hand, "a friend of Dr. McLoughlin and a missionary among the Flatheads."

"Pierre Jean DeSmet," Harriote repeated, "Father Blanchet has told me about you. You are indeed welcome. I apologize for receiving you like this. A fur trader is no good to his company in my condition. No, don't sit in that chair—it has no bottom." He motioned to another near the bed. "Come over here. Ogden says this is the most uncomfortable chair in the territory, but that's because it's too damn big for him."

"I hope your illness is not serious."

The Englishman chuckled. "Not as serious as good health. In the Blackfoot country, Father, we don't die. We get killed. Lying in bed is the safest thing a man can do."

"I brought two Flatheads with me," the priest said, "but your doorman wouldn't let them in. They are two good friends of mine and are waiting with the pack animals outside."

"That's too bad. I'll have them taken care of." He pounded on the floor with a cane and the servant reappeared, carrying the child under her arm. "Tistighat, the Blackrobe's guides and horses are outside. Do you understand?"

The woman bent her head slightly, frowning as if in deep thought. "Outside—horses—"

Harriote held up two fingers. "Horses and two guides."

"Horses and two guides," the woman repeated.

"Listen, Tistighat, have Gervais bring them in and take care of them."

A light came into the half-breed's face. "Food, water, stable," she said.

"That's right."

When she had gone, Harriote turned to the priest, a faint smile on his face. "That's my daughter," he explained. "When we were escaping from the Blackfeet, she fell from a horse and hasn't been right since. She was just a child." Then, apparently reading the other man's thoughts, he added without embarrassment, "The baby—I don't know who the father is. It doesn't matter. Things like that happen up here, you know. She's a good girl."

"Thank you for taking care of my men," Father DeSmet said.

"Don't mention it. It's a rule we have to make. If the employees were permitted to let any native inside, we would all be massacred. The Indians trade through the portholes. Well, how is the doctor?"

"Astutely handling a bad situation," the priest answered, remembering Ogden's request.

Harriote opened a snuff-box and pushed a pinch of tobacco into one nostril. "Sort of a buffer, I guess, the doctor is—the Yankees on one side of him and the English on the other. By the way, I've got some rum, but I can't reach it from the bed. Under that table, see. Pour yourself a glass."

"Thank you. We've had a hard day." Father DeSmet pulled out the bottle, at the bottom of which he noticed a sticky yellow rim of liquid, apparently left by an earlier guest. "The doctor

is the only man I know who could handle such a job," he said as he filled the glass. "He never compromises—works, fights, and lives for England, and at the same time makes himself popular with the Americans."

"Right you are. It's book learning that made him," Harriote remarked. "The doctor swears by book learning. Up here at Rocky Mountain House, if we can get furs from the savages and still keep our own hides, we think we've done enough. What is your business in this part of the country?"

"I've been hunting for the Blackfeet, but without luck."

Harriote whistled. "The Blackfeet! I would understand you better, sir, if you were running away from them." He studied the priest's scratched, bruised face a moment. He liked those frank blue eyes and the gray hair which had grown as long as McLoughlin's and which fell over his cassock. "Father, what good can you do the missions when you are dead?"

"The Blackfeet are driving my Flatheads out of the buffalo country, Mr. Harriote. If we don't make peace with them, there won't be any missions."

The fur trader raised himself on one elbow. "We have bars and bolts on every building in this fort. There's not a square yard of ground without a place above it to fire down in case of trouble. If you find the Blackfeet, you'll not get back alive."

The two men sat without speaking, looking into one another's eyes. Harriote thought the priest looked a little amused and was annoyed by it.

Father DeSmet fingered his crucifix. "Mr. Harriote, will you tell me where I can find the Blackfeet?"

"Humph!" the trader grunted, sinking down on the pillow. "You men from Oregon don't know this country. Your Indians are cows—I've seen them, the Kalispels and Nez Percés and Coeur d'Alenes. Because you've milked a cow, don't think you can go out and milk a tiger."

"Monsieur, I have work to do, and I have God's help."

"We used to have a post south of Bow River. The Blackfeet plundered it so often we lost more than we made, and in the end they burned it to the ground."



"And they will burn the Flathead mission the same way," the priest answered.

Harriote stared at the ceiling. "I've heard a lot of things about you, Father DeSmet. This country needs such men. Don't throw yourself away on the Blackfeet. I've watched their children, little fellows not shoulder high, burn pine-needles on the backs of their hands and rip each other's legs with pointed bones for the pleasure of inflicting pain."

"I appreciate your kindness," Father DeSmet said, "but you have not yet answered my question. Where can I find the Blackfeet?"

The fur trader sighed. "Damn it all! You Jesuits are fool-hardy. Die if you want to. Meanwhile, stay here, Father. Some of the devils will come to trade before snow sets in." The trader picked up his cane and pounded on the floor. His daughter appeared in the doorway. "Take the Blackrobe to the guest room," he said.

## 6

Cold October rains chilled not only the flesh and bones but also the hearts of the men at Rocky Mountain House. Rain seemed to beat the huddled buildings into the ground. The log fires gave little cheer to those long twilit days that, born without sunrise, lingered hour after hour as if in the dim region between life and death. Father DeSmet was usually wakened in the morning by the inaudible movements of Tistighat as she entered his room to light the fire. It was so difficult to talk with her that he often pretended to be asleep, only opening his eyes to observe the woman when she turned her back and stooped over the fire.

Later she would bring him breakfast—a small baked fish, a slice of dark bread, and a cup of tea, pale-colored and tasteless because tea was dear and used sparingly. After eating, Father DeSmet would stand at his window watching the men come back from the river, their seines filled with fish. Later, if he wandered down to the stores, with a buffalo robe flung over his cassock, he could watch the half-breeds stringing their catch. One man standing with his back to the drizzle would pierce the fish with

the point of a knife about two inches from the tail; another would string them on a twisted willow branch; and a third would carry them to the northwest bastion, where a straggly tree afforded shade. Here they were hung heads down to spoil if the weather grew milder, or in time to freeze.

Life at the trading post became quieter. One morning the Crees departed, their tepee poles slanting along their ponies' flanks and dragging on the ground. Then a dozen white men rode into the rain for buffalo. Two days later the slow procession of one-horse meat carts started off in the same direction. The nightly quarrels, the hard drinking, and the ribald stories departed with the men.

Sometimes the priest spent an evening talking with the bedridden fur trader, while the mournful songs of the half-breed women rose above the *drip, drip* of October rain and the comforting crackle of the hearthfire. Sometimes he sat in his room writing his journal, reading his breviary, or saying prayers.

When the buffalo carts returned laden with quartered carcasses, the men brought news. The Crees had swooped down upon a band of Blackfeet and ridden off with fifty horses and twenty-seven scalps. The Crows had exterminated one entire band of them, taking one hundred and sixty women and children for slaves.

"It is well for you," Harriote said to Father DeSmet. "The Blackfeet will be wretched and may think you can give them a medicine for revenge."

"I can't offer them that," the priest answered, frowning. "The only remedy in my bag is a medicine for peace."

One day a free trapper came up the Saskatchewan, a long-haired fellow, wearing a blanket coat and an ostrich feather in his hat. Harriote had been moved into the parlor and, wrapped to the chin in robes, he sat in an armchair before the fire. Father DeSmet, restless at his protracted imprisonment at the fort, walked aimlessly about the room, while the free trapper drained a glass of rum.

"I got the news from Lavois," the trapper said. "He had just spent two nights in a Crow camp. The Blackfeet are quick-

witted. They don't take defeat. Their hearts are hard and sharp-edged like a knife blade."

Harriote puffed his pipe, smiling a little. "A hundred and sixty female slaves in a Crow camp wouldn't have a chance to make a concerted plot," he said. "The Crows are smart enough to keep them separated. What happened?"

The trapper leaned over the table so that his hair fell forward into his beard. "After the victory the Crows sacrificed some of the Blackfeet women to the *manes* of their kinsmen. Then they decided they needed workers and would profit by making the rest slaves. Meanwhile, a scarlet fever epidemic set in. The Crows began to die off pretty fast."

"That's luck for you," Harriote said, drawing on his pipe with a wheezy sound. "Disease always hits the strongest tribes."

The trapper poured himself a second glass. "Well, the Blackfeet had scarlet fever two years ago, so the Crows asked the squaws for a remedy. One old shrew counseled cold baths, and the others were wise enough to keep their mouths shut. The sick at once plunged into the river. Mothers dipped their children in the water. It was so cold they had to break a thin surface of ice to do it. After that, their bodies were piled up like dead buffalo, and Lavois said you could hear their shrieks a mile away."

"I'm not too glad about it," Harriote remarked. "We need the Crows for the trade."

"The fewer Crows the more horses you'll have," the trapper suggested.

"And the fewer beavers," Harriote put in.

The priest said nothing. He realized more than ever before that the country east of the Rockies was a different world from Oregon. It seemed incredible that the mild-mannered Flatheads and the haughty, sad-eyed Kootenais belonged to the same race as these wild, warring tribes of the plains. Once again the old fear slid into his heart, but when he half turned away and touched his crucifix, following with his fingers the contour of the figure stretched on that cross, his fear died. He looked at the two men. Harriote had become drowsy from the fire's warmth. He had put away his pipe, and sat with his head tilted against the high

back of his chair. The trapper was getting drunk. Father DeSmet studied them a moment. Each man appeared to be enclosed in his own separate world of thoughts and memories. Unobserved the priest left the room.

With the first swirl of winter snow two Blackfeet rode up to Rocky Mountain House. Father DeSmet did not see them, but the *engagés* described the warriors as terrible to look upon, for their faces were painted scarlet and scalp-locks dangled from their shoulders. They brought news that thirteen members of their tribe were on the way with peltries. Having drunk heartily of rum and made sure that their enemies, the Crees, were no longer in the neighborhood, they left. As soon as the heavy doors closed behind them, the men at the fort set to work. Quickly and quietly they made an examination to see that every bolt and lock was in good order. The means of communication between the Indian room and the rest of the buildings was shut off. Guns were cleaned, reloaded, and placed, together with quantities of ammunition, by the many loop-holes in the lofts above the trading room. A guard was stationed to watch the south horizon line. After ten days of such vigilance the approach of Indians was announced. Then the men inside the fort rushed to the stockade and into the bastions.

Father DeSmet saw a moving cloud of dust over the plains, rolling nearer and nearer, until a throng of Indians on gaily caparisoned ponies whirled out of the dust and galloped over the prairie at full speed. They lashed their horses mercilessly, forcing them to swim across the river, and without coming to the fort, rode on to pitch camp downstream.

Father DeSmet went at once to the fur trader's room. "I am going to see the Blackfeet," he said.

"Don't be a fool," Harriote warned him. "Wait until they come to trade."

"I am going today," the priest insisted, and before the trader could say another word, he left the room, going directly to the stable.

The horse keeper shook his head gravely when Father De-



Smet asked that two ponies be saddled. "You don't know what you're gettin' into," he warned.

"I'll be back early. Wait for me."

"Maybe, maybe not. *Mon père*, do not go."

Jacques, the interpreter who had agreed to accompany the priest, said nothing.

Shortly before sunset the door was unbarred and the two men rode out.

The Blackfeet had already raised their tepees and were spreading wet robes on the ground to dry. The chief, more than six feet tall in his moccasins, had a hawk's nose and the thin, tight lips of Caesar. Scalp-locks were sewn into the seams of his clothing. He held his head high, so that all the feather tips of the war-bonnet which framed his face pointed downward. When he met Father DeSmet he planted his tall scalp-stick on the ground in front of him, holding on to it with his right hand. The priest saw in the middle of the stick a cluster of loose flaxen curls that must have been a woman's. Lying golden against the black native hair fastened above and below them, they reminded Father DeSmet of the pale curls of his little niece in Belgium. Yet when he lifted his eyes from them to receive the Blackfoot's greeting, he did not wince. The red painted nose roughly brushed his cheek.

The lamp in Harriote's room burned late that night. The fur trader could not sleep. He lay in bed listening always for the groaning hinges of the gate. The little clock on the table near his bed moved slowly. From time to time he would shift his position and grumble under his breath, "Damn fool! Keeping me awake . . ." At last he heard the soft thud of horses' hoofs.

Father DeSmet strode into the trader's room confidently. "They have promised to warn the tribe I am coming. They are to go back to the camp first, and I will follow a week later. There is no danger, Monsieur Harriote; they are friendly."

"The Blackfeet are never friendly," the fur trader snapped. "Do you think they would murder a white man at the door of our stockade? I'm so damn tired waiting. I thought you'd never

come." He raised himself suddenly to his elbows. "You fool! If you go to their camp, it is the end."

Father DeSmet felt conviction in the other man's voice. "Then it is the end," he replied.

Nevertheless, the next morning he said to Francis and Pilchimo, "You must go back to the Flatheads."

Pilchimo folded his arms across his chest defiantly. "Father, we die with you."

"If you go back to your people, none of us will die," the priest answered. "The Blackfeet may spare me, but they would never spare a Flathead."

So Pilchimo and Francis turned south again, and Father DeSmet lingered another week at Rocky Mountain House to give the Blackfeet a head start.

Jacques was the only man at the fort who knew the Blackfoot language.

"Jacques is a thief and a murderer," Harriote warned. "At Jasper House he killed an *engagé* whose wife he had taken. Then for two years he disappeared. When he showed up here we were afraid to turn him away. It's safer to give such men work than to turn them loose with hate smoldering in their breasts."

There was, however, no alternative. Snow had already fallen intermittently, making white patches along the gulches and lying like cotton in the forks of trees. Since Father DeSmet could not afford to dally longer, Jacques was chosen. He was a thin-faced, sullen man who spoke little and walked with a limp. He did not like the priest's guide, a half-breed who had been slapped by a grizzly bear and whose features, as a consequence, were twisted against his right cheek, giving him a perpetual grimace. If Jacques spoke little, the half-breed, who was called Toto, spoke not at all. He loaded the pack horses silently, from time to time glancing at Jacques from the corner of his eye as if he feared him.

By the first of November the three men were riding through the dry grasses of the northern prairie. Conversation was impossible. Guide and interpreter each seemed to be waiting for the moment when they would spring at one another's throats, the one man frightened, the other cunning and self-possessed.

The priest rode between them, keeping his eyes on the horizon line far off where the grasses turned purple and melted imperceptibly into a slate-colored sky. If they came to water before sunset, Jacques would say, "Go on," and Toto would look at the priest, mutely beseeching him with his eyes to obey. Night after night, for no apparent reason, they passed streams and grass only to make a dry camp where the horses could find no food. It occurred to Father DeSmet to protest, but Jacques carried a knife under his sash and a gun in his hip pocket. In the dark, Toto and the priest would often lie awake for hours, not daring to sleep until they heard the heavy breathing of the man beside them. Then Jacques acquired the habit of sitting up, his knees drawn under his chin, watching his companions sullenly.

"Why don't you go to sleep?" Father DeSmet asked him once.

"Sleep is not the business of a watchdog," Jacques replied tersely, sliding his fingers along the handle of his knife.

The priest could hear Toto catch his breath quickly. In the distance a coyote howled, and all was still again. There must have been a quarrel of long standing between the two men. Yet what it was, Father DeSmet never found out. It was impossible to talk to Jacques, for his only reply to questions he considered impertinent was a wolfish growl. In his long journeys through the wilderness Father DeSmet had never carried a weapon. "The rosary in my pocket and my crucifix are better than a gun," he used to say when the fur traders chided him. Now he began to think that Jacques had come only for the opportunity to kill Toto.

For ten days they rode across the plain like men sentenced to death. On the eleventh it began to snow. After the first blanket had fallen, a black wind from the west scooped it up from the ground and flung white flurries down again until the gullies cradled deep drifts, although the flat land lay bare. Where the country became rolling they saw a buffalo herd like a black forest on the hills, but the animals, scenting the men, vanished. Toward noon a Canadian, traveling with his squaw and five children, appeared, making slow progress against the gale.

"Thanks to God, a priest," he said, offering his hand.

"Do you speak English?" Father DeSmet asked.

"*Bien sûr*," the man replied. "At Cumberland House much English is spoken."

Jacques knew only French. Father DeSmet put his hand on the Canadian's shoulder. "Monsieur, will you help rescue a priest from the Devil?" he asked in English.

"I would die for the priest who absolves me from my sins," the Canadian said. "Father, I have a cabin near Cumberland House. One night I heard someone moving among my horses. I thought I was being robbed. I shot into the darkness. I killed a girl. She had come to escape from her father, who was drunk and had beaten her. Now we are hiding in the plains."

"Turn around and go back with me for three days, and you who have taken a life may save one."

Toto could not understand the conversation, but sensing that Father DeSmet was asking help he looked at the Canadian with expressive eyes. Jacques' hand, as usual, was on his knife. The stranger saw them and understood. "We go back," he said to his squaw, and they turned their horses toward the east.

When they pitched camp that night the Canadian sat up with Jacques. "I do not need sleep," he said to Father DeSmet. "Maybe you do."

He wrapped his blanket about his shoulders and faced the interpreter. The others lay between them. But the Canadian was more fatigued than he had realized. Before dawn his head fell between his knees and he slept. In the morning Jacques was gone. Although there was a smile on Toto's twisted face, he said nothing. The guide packed the horses, and the party continued their journey. Father DeSmet asked no questions. He knew that the black crows harrying the plains were no more plentiful than the secrets it held. The guide was free to talk or not, and the priest respected his silence.

"You have done me a service which God will not forget," he said to the Canadian at the end of three days. "I need you no longer."



The snow that fell ceaselessly for four days, covering familiar tracks and burying the withered grass, proved Toto a poor guide. The dead land stretched endlessly in an unchanging monotone of white. No rising sun assured the travelers that they were moving east. No friendly stars pointed the way. Game was scarce. Now and then they came upon remnants of camps, for the Crees were beating up the country and had carried everything before them. But the men could not follow the Indians whose footprints were quickly obliterated by the snow. The horses, having no fodder save the bark which they gnawed from poplars and birches along the streams, became gaunt. Finally Toto admitted he was lost.

"If we cannot find the Blackfeet," Father DeSmet said, "let us go back."

But Toto did not know where to turn. In whatever direction they chose to ride the men felt certain that they were plunging deeper into that desert of snow and farther away from help. Their beards, wet with the moisture from their breaths, froze into masses of ice, and they were forced to blink constantly to prevent their eyelids from freezing shut. The bits clung to the mouths of their horses. A cold wind cut across their faces, so that Father DeSmet's cheeks became hard and finally cracked open, making raw red gashes that pained when he tried to speak. On all sides of them long snow ridges seemed to be rolled upon one another like the waves of a white, opaque sea. If they whipped their ponies into a trot, the men's clothing became wet with perspiration, and when they halted later it would turn cold against their skins. Hour after hour the priest repeated prayers to himself. "The *Aves* which I have sown on the desert are thicker than goldenrod," he thought.

Their food supply grew so scant that they chewed upon their own buffalo robes. They lost track of time, until the days meant only an unending chain of misery broken by the short forgetfulness of night.

Toward the end of December Toto awakened one morning

and looked about him over the flat, desolate prairie. Suddenly he cried out, "See, Father, way off, that hill. The Saskatchewan lies beyond. In two days we shall be at Fort Edmonton."

The next afternoon they saw a herd of wild horses, which scampered away at their approach. In foraging for themselves, the animals had scraped the snow away with their hoofs, baring tufts of dry grass. With a cruelty born of necessity the men lashed the flanks of their own starving ponies, driving them over the tempting pasturage toward the fort.

When the door of the stockade was opened, Father DeSmet looked into the face of the Frenchman and said, "Monsieur, we are starving."

The warm comfort of the fire, the sound of men's voices, the rum burning his throat were all that he remembered of that night. When he asked for food they told him that he might stay there for a hundred years and be well fed, for thirty thousand whitefish and five hundred buffalo lay in the ice-house, the harvest of turnips and potatoes had been good, and the marshes along the river, where ducks and wild swans came to breed in thousands, were filled with eggs.

Meanwhile, no news could be learned of the Blackfeet. The traders at the fort said that one might wander forever without finding them. Indeed, the general opinion was that Father DeSmet had been tricked by the Indians at Rocky Mountain House, who probably had no intention of granting him admission to their camp.

The priest's strength came back slowly, and with it a gnawing hunger to return to the Flatheads. Every morning when he taught the half-breed children of the fort their catechism, he would long for the mild-mannered children of the Bitter Root Valley. Every afternoon when he heard the sound of hammers and saws and the ring of the blacksmith's anvil, he thought of the Flatheads working at St. Mary's Mission. The men at Fort Edmonton were making and repairing boats, carts, and sleighs for their annual voyage to York Factory on the west shore of Hudson's Bay.

"Can they make me a sleigh?" Father DeSmet asked. "One that will go over the mountains to St. Mary's Mission?"

"We can give you sledges," the clerk explained, "but they'll only take you as far as the Fourche du Trou. Beyond there you would have to go on snowshoes, and you're too fat. You can't do it."

The priest looked at the men around him. Hard muscles they had, but their bodies were small, as lean and thin as antelopes. Yet he who had nearly starved to death on the plains still moved clumsily because of his weight. "I am like a bear," he complained. "How much time do I have?"

"You should get to the Bitter Root country before snow melts," he was told. "Otherwise you will have trouble. That means you must leave no later than March."

It was then the middle of February.

"I shall take off thirty pounds," the priest said, "a pound for every day."

He cheerfully settled down to a diet of milkless tea and little cakes of flour and water baked in the ashes of an open fire. On Sundays he poured meat juice over them. "That I may not forget what a good thing I am foregoing," he remarked with a twinkle in his eyes. Each week he pulled the cincture of his cassock tighter, until the men looked at him with open admiration.

In March the traders gave him three dog sleds and as many half-breeds. "Go north to Fort Assiniboin," they told him, "and ascend the Athabasca southward beyond Jasper House. There's a pass over the mountains from there to the Columbia."

Father DeSmet examined the sledges with interest. They were made of two thin birchwood boards lashed together with deerskin thongs and turned up in front like Norwegian snowshoes. He thought they were very frail for so long a trip and wondered how he could squeeze himself into a seat only sixteen inches wide.

March eleventh was cold and sunny. "It is good weather," the clerk of the trading post said. "Start out tomorrow before a blizzard sets in."

The next morning the priest was wakened by yelling and

screaming. The squaws, having rounded up the pack of dogs, had brought some of them into the fort. Father DeSmet's three sledges were ready, and the women were attempting to harness the snarling beasts. They fell upon the dogs with big sticks, beating them so relentlessly that the poor animals rolled over and over and yelled in agony and terror until each team was yoked.

Father DeSmet dressed quickly, ate his breakfast, and went out to review his equipage. The animals were alert, waving their furry tails, turning about restlessly in their harnesses as if eager to go. They were dressed in gaudy red and blue saddle-cloths, fringed and embroidered like the trappings of a king's horses. Whenever they moved, the painted feathers on their backs dipped to the side and the little bells fastened along the back-bands of their harnesses jingled softly. The three half-breeds kept shouting at the dogs in corrupt French which the priest could not understand. Then the clerk came out, bundled him up in blankets, and by some miraculous maneuvering got him into the little chair of the third sled. A minute later they were off with a tremendous bound. He waved farewell to the *engagés* and to the British flag whose bright colors flamed in the sun. All the tiny bells now sang together and the white tails of the dogs waved like plumes.

The smooth ice-crust that covered the snow was as dazzling as if it had been studded with stars. The sleds skimmed over it so easily and swiftly that the priest had the sensation of whirling through space. Clumps of willows flew past him. As they shot down rolling hills the earth dropped away and the whole universe became a whirling mass of white and a chorus of tinkling music.

Before they reached the Athabasca River the paws of the dogs had begun to bleed; so the half-breeds tied tiny leather shoes over their feet, fastening them below the knee, muttering all the time, "*Sacré chien mort*," as if the beasts were to blame for their trouble.

From bank to bank snow lay spread over the frozen surface of the river, but it too had a crust of ice and glittered so brightly that Father DeSmet, fearing snow-blindness, drew the blankets over his eyes and lay in darkness, letting the fleet onward move-



ment of the sled and the constant jingle of bells lull him into a stupor, broken only by frequent halts when the dogs were allowed to rest and the men might smoke their pipes. The thin, birchwood bottom of the sledge, which yielded in graceful curves under the priest, could not protect him from the rough ice. Soon his body became covered with stone-bruises that turned traveling into misery. Day after day he saw nothing but long reaches of land thickly wooded with pines that formed a black border for the white, tortuous river bed. Toward evening, when the dogs tired, the crack of whips, the howling of the animals, and the oaths of the drivers drowned out the bells. When wind from the ice field blew down, the roar of tossing trees was like the ocean in a storm, but when the wind subsided, the trees stood silent and motionless again. "As if they have the 'peace that passeth understanding,'" Father DeSmet thought. Where the forest thinned and the prairie plateau approached the river's edge, black bitumen oozed out of the bank and the scent of tar was strong on the bitter air. The Athabasca world was etched in black and white. The sun rose late over the pine-clad hills, and the hills covered it again long before sunset. Once a single file of caribou appeared and vanished, the beautiful white and gray of their winter coats taking on a violet tint.

As Father DeSmet lay in his sledge, aching with bruises and feeling the icy touch of furs against his cheeks, he felt the invisible presence of the Holy Virgin at his side. All his plans had failed. The Blackfeet had escaped him. For nearly a year he had suffered cold and hunger and misery to no avail, and he was still thousands of miles from the Flatheads. Yet the presence of the Mother of God warmed his heart. It seemed to him that he had never really been alone. Even the bleak plains beyond the Rocky Mountains had been populous with angels and the prayers of the faithful, and with the steadfast friendship of God. When his hands grew numb from cold, he warmed them merely by touching his beads. "It is a good life," he thought, "that has been granted me, this life between two worlds."

Fort Assiniboin, which consisted of two log cabins nestled in a fertile valley on the Athabasca, was only a post for taking

care of horses. The man in charge kept the priest one night and sent him on. Nine days later Colin Fraser and his Cree squaw opened the door of Jasper House to a half-frozen priest and three half-breeds. Father DeSmet thawed himself out before a blazing fire while the squaw roasted a mountain sheep. Because a band of Indians had camped near the fort, he remained to give instructions and baptize the children. At night he slept in the common guest-room, where traders, *voyageurs*, half-breeds, and Indians huddled together on the floor indiscriminately like a pack of wolves in a blizzard.

By the middle of April provisions grew lean. On the towering precipices around the fort mountain sheep could be sighted, moving in small bands along the snow-encrusted rocks; but the Indians could not reach them, for ice was breaking in the streams and the immense masses of snow which rolled down the mountainsides with a terrific thundering noise made climbing inadvisable. Consequently, the dogs were again harnessed to the sledges.

"Leave the river at the Great Crossing," Fraser said to the priest, "and go into the valley of the Fourche du Trou."

The journey overland was difficult. In the deep evergreen forests the sleds were frequently upset by fallen trees hidden under the snow. Where the hills shot up almost perpendicularly, the dogs would stop abruptly and turn in their traces, enraging the drivers who would flog them on the head until their ears dripped blood. "For the love of God, straighten your traces!" the half-breeds would shout. "*Marche!*" and the crouching dogs would once more tug wildly at their moose-skin collars, howling under the lash of whipstocks.

Father DeSmet's heart sickened at the brutality of these drivers. The seared, whip-marked faces of the dogs, their sad eyes, and their bleeding feet disturbed his sleep. He spoke little. He felt the dead weight of an inertia which held him with an iron grasp—the inertia that all men know who have endured those short twilit days and long, bitterly cold nights, huddled together by the fire with the dogs curled at their feet.

The April sun at last melted the ice-crust over open valleys so that the sledge runners sank into it. One day the dogs floun-

dered in snow too deep, and a half-breed, having found that his curses availed little, began pounding the leader with a club until the animal's nose and jaws were one mutilated wound.

The inertia that had gripped the priest disappeared. He threw back his fur robes and stood up. "Stop! By the memory of our Holy Mother of God, stop! You are killing the beast!" he shouted.

The half-breed turned about. "*Mon père*, you cannot kill these dogs. They are tough."

"I am paying for your services," Father DeSmet replied. "I forbid you to flog the dogs."

Now the drivers turned to him amazed. "Do you mean to freeze to death?" one of them asked.

"I mean that we are Christians and shall act like Christians."

The drivers burst out laughing rudely. The man who had done the clubbing winked at the others. "*Bien, mon père*. We shall not use the whips."

The sulking dogs had lain down, some of them rolling over in the powdery snow so that their harnesses were tangled. The half-breeds put away their whips and shouted oaths in a chorus. The animals paid no attention. Father DeSmet, wrapped in his furs, lay watching.

"*Marche*, little black dog!"

"*Geddie! Sacré chien!*"

"Fool! Damned cur!"

Although the drivers continued shouting and coaxing, the animals did not heed them. Father DeSmet began to regret his interference. Apparently these poor beasts would obey only under the club. Finally he was forced to admit defeat. "Messieurs," he called to his guides. "You are right. We cannot freeze to death."

The drivers laughed without malice and fell to beating the dogs. Once again, with the beasts howling and dripping blood, the sledges moved on.

One day they met a band of Carriers who, driven by hunger, had migrated to the eastern side of the mountain. In spite of the rigorous weather, their scanty rags were not sufficient to cover

their bodies and many went barefoot. One squaw, who had bound a narrow strip of hide over her breasts, carried on her back the charred bones of her dead husband. Although the Indians were undernourished, having lived long on roots, they offered the priest two moose noses, which they valued above all other food.

As the three men penetrated farther into the mountains the snow became deeper. In higher altitudes, where spring does not come until late June, the berry bushes were completely hidden. Then the tall branches of Douglas firs rose trunkless out of the drifts. Late one afternoon they camped at the source of the River Du Trou before an immense mountain of pure ice caught between enormous rocks. A gap in the western hills permitted the sunset to slide through, bathing in deep rose the whiteness of the glacier and all the snow-covered peaks beyond. The dogs, which had been stripped of their collars and fed upon frozen fish, lay stretched out on the snow, rose-colored dogs upon a rose-colored ground. One of the half-breeds moved silently back and forth on snowshoes, gathering balsam twigs. Another drove green logs into the snow to make a firebed. Whether it was the reflection of the sun upon the glacier or his imagination, Father DeSmet did not know, but the faces of the men seemed to change from the natural golden brown of their skins to the red color of brick.

With unbelievable quickness the foundations of three balsam beds were laid. Then a kettle of snow swung over the fire. Gradually the rose color changed to purple. Long cerise streamers appeared where the hills revealed the strip of sky. The ice field also turned purple, and purple dogs slumbered on purple snow.

In May all the barriers of snow which had dammed the streams, lakes, and torrents were broken up. The sides of the mountains moved, slowly sloughing their winter burden. The dog sleds were abandoned and Father DeSmet floundered awkwardly on snowshoes, finding it difficult to keep pace with his guides. Many times a false step plunged him twenty or thirty feet below the trail, and the half-breeds waited impatiently while he dug the soft, wet snow from his collar and sleeves.



Then one afternoon the men cried out in a chorus, "The Brigade!"

Far down the mountainside they saw a group of men and women on snowshoes, a patch of bright colors that drew nearer and answered the frantic gestures of the half-breeds with the distant call of a bagpipe. Father DeSmet discerned two men in scarlet; then he saw the cocked hat and satin waistcoat of the commander; and finally the gaudy, painted hides, sashes, and handkerchiefs of *voyageurs* and Indian hunters.

The Brigade made slow progress up the mountainside, but Father DeSmet and his companions fairly bounded down to meet it.

"The United States acts too slowly for a Britisher," Lieutenant Vavasour said when he greeted the priest. "*Mon père*, we performed our duty without opposition."

Frank Ermatinger, the commander, had not seen Father DeSmet since the latter's visit to Fort Hall six years before. The ruffles that flopped over his wrists were muddy, but he stood straight and tall, with one leg forward as if he was proud of the sword in his boot. "I warned you against these Goddamned Indians," he said. "But you have grown into an Indian yourself."

Father DeSmet laughed. "And we're a friendly tribe, the three of us. We've left footprints all the way from here to Edmonton, if you will follow them."

The two parties lingered long enough to smoke together and exchange news. The Brigade was on its way to York Factory and had come by way of Great Portage River.

"The river is badly swollen," Ermatinger warned the priest. "You'll have trouble getting through and snowshoes won't help."

"They've been a nuisance even in the snow," the priest confessed. "My guides have to pull me out of the tree branches a dozen times a day."

The fur trader had not exaggerated. In the two days Father DeSmet and his guides followed the meandering Great Portage River they were forced to wade across it fifty times, often with the icy water up to their shoulders.

"I reduce thirty pounds," the priest said mournfully one night, "and look at my legs. They are like tree-trunks."

"They are swollen," one of the half-breeds replied. "Cold water does that."

Father DeSmet had taken off his moccasins and was rubbing his ankles, hoping to cure the aching numbness in them. As he slid his hand over his foot, one of his toenails fell off. "I grow in my legs and I am rotting away in my feet," he remarked, laughing, and painlessly he peeled off the other nine nails.

That night, as he lay with a buffalo robe wrapped over his wet clothing, he could not sleep. His body ached and the numbness in his legs rose into his hips, then upwards even through his shoulders. He shifted his position, but it brought no relief. The heaviness of his swollen limbs was uncomfortable, and he could not bear the touch of anything against his toes. In the morning he lay motionless, numb with an enormous fatigue. His clothing was still wet and cold.

"Pierre Jean DeSmet," he whispered to himself, "have you no courage?" He felt for his rosary and thought how small were his discomforts compared to those of the blessed Saviour bearing His own cross. Yet he continued to remain lazily stretched out under the buffalo robes. His guides were cooking breakfast. The long tramp through the water had affected them no more than if they had been beavers. Father DeSmet watched them as they worked. Suddenly he noticed his feet protruding from under the blankets. His moccasins were stiff and dry with blood. He sat up, pulled them off, and examined his feet. They too were splotted with blood. He had not noticed that the night before. It had been dark. Hideous, shapeless feet they were, red and puffy and with no nails. He replaced the moccasins hastily.

When he tried to stand, sharp pains shot into his hips, but he said nothing about them to the half-breeds. As long as he could walk they must go on.

They left the river valley and passed through a thick forest where thousands of pines lay dead on the ground. Beyond this forest stretched a wide black marsh, which they plowed through, knee-deep in mud and water. It was not so cold as the water of

the Great Portage, and they did not need to cling to one another fighting a tempestuous current. Yet the numbness in the priest's legs increased, until the guides were forced to carry him part of the time.

At the great bend of the Columbia River, where it sweeps around the northernmost tip of the Selkirk Range and flows south, Hudson's Bay Company had established a small post known as Boat Encampment. There traders traveling east stored their *bateaux*, and those traveling west disposed of snowshoes and horses and embarked for the lower Columbia. Cabin, stables and boat-house stood in a wide, low valley surrounded by mountains.

One day in May three half-breeds and a priest knocked at the door. Father DeSmet was leaning heavily on the arms of his guides. He dragged his left foot, and his face was drawn and white. Over his shoulders fell a shock of unkempt hair which had not been combed for a long time. His cassock was much too large for the thin body it covered. While the men at the post half carried him to a chair of logs drawn up before a blazing fire, the cook put a kettle of pork and corn soup to boil. Although the priest was too exhausted to talk, the half-breeds gave an incoherent account of their journey from Fort Edmonton.

When the soup was ready, Father DeSmet drank it so avidly that one of the men took the bowl away before he finished, fearing he might overeat in his exhausted state.

"Can we have a boat?" the priest asked.

"You are not fit to go on. Stay here a week or two," one man said.

Father DeSmet smiled at him indulgently. "Monsieur, if I stay here a week, I shall die. May we have a boat tomorrow?"

As usual he was not to be dissuaded. The next morning one of the high-built, broad *bateaux*, which the traders used in preference to the lighter Indian canoes, was fitted out with supplies; and Father DeSmet began the tedious journey of a thousand miles down the Columbia River.

## 8

One morning in August, 1846, Father Gregory Mengarini walked down the path between the little church of St. Mary's Mission and the cow pasture. It was his custom every forenoon to visit the barn, the saw-mill, and the flour-mill. Not that an inspection was necessary. The Flatheads accomplished their appointed tasks without supervision. However, to begin the day in this fashion gave him comfort and insurance against despair. Furthermore, since the saw-mill was situated beyond the orchard, the walk afforded him the exercise he needed. Space for the garden had been plowed in a field of lupin, and it was now hidden behind a border of blue flowers. They were radiant under the morning sun. The priest hummed softly to himself a quaint Italian folksong. It was one his mother had always sung when she gathered the ripened grapes in Italy. When he reached the farther side of the garden he turned around. The twelve frame buildings which had been erected that year gleamed white beyond the border of blue flowers. He remembered that the melody he was humming was a love song and stopped. If he looked south from the point where he stood, he could catch a glimpse of cattle grazing behind a cluster of trees. If he looked north, he could see the roof of the hog-house.

His gay spirits must have depended on that forbidden love song, for when he stopped singing a wistful loneliness came to him, resting against his heart as lightly as the touch of a butterfly wing on lupin. "If only Pierre Jean DeSmet would come back," he thought. Pilchimo and Francis Xavier had not brought encouraging news. They had told how the traders at Rocky Mountain House feared the Blackfeet, and how they had tried to dissuade the priest from continuing his search. Apparently those Indians hated white men as intensely as they hated the Flatheads. Father DeSmet had been gone a year, far too long a time. In that year Father Mengarini and his new Christians had begun to realize a dream. The Italian sighed and ran his hand through his black curls. If Father Pierre were to come now, he would be happy. He would put his hand on Mengarini's shoulder and laugh



and say, "It is a wonderful life that we have chosen—this planting and sowing and reaping for God."

He began retracing his steps to the church, walking slowly, loath to leave the bright blue flowers and the yellow butterflies that hung upon them. Then he saw Mina-Yougha coming to meet him. She wore a green calico dress, girdled at the waist with a scarlet ribbon. Her black braids fell over her shoulders. Seen at a distance she might have been mistaken for an Italian peasant. As she approached he saw that she was carrying a basket of eggs.

"Mina-Yougha, you are like a tree in that dress," he said. "Has your harvest been good?"

The Indian set her basket on the ground. "Father, the small brown hen with spotted wings deserves to die. She eats more than all the rest, and she has not laid one egg this week."

"She is no Christian," the priest answered, looking affectionately at the eggs in the basket. "How do you know she has not laid?"

"I saw her leaving the nest once. Her eggs are wrinkled at the smaller end." Mina-Yougha was serious. It was her daily task to feed the chickens and gather the eggs, which duty she accepted with such gravity that she felt morally obliged to find one egg for every hen.

"That is unfortunate." The priest tried to consider the matter in earnest. "Watch her another week, Mina-Yougha. If she still does not lay, we shall eat her."

"The others do better," the woman said. "The black hen that lays the small brown eggs has only missed once."

They walked back together, Father Mengarini carrying the basket. The sun was warm. Grasshoppers jumped out of the weeds as they passed. The mission seemed to be sleeping in the sultry summer air.

"The hunters have been gone ten days," Mina-Yougha said suddenly. "I am making Ignace some new moccasins, with a cross of red quills on them. If he is sorrowful and lowers his head, he will see the cross and think of Jesus."

They had reached the first of the twelve frame houses. In front of it two small boys were rolling over and over in the dust.

Before Father Mengarini realized what was happening the larger one had pinned his opponent down and was pommeling him between the ribs. The smaller child endured the beating in silence.

"Chita, Chita," Mina-Yougha cried, running out to interfere. Father Mengarini followed at her heels. Together they pulled the boys apart. "Brave men do not fight like that," the woman scolded, shaking the offending Chita by the shoulders. "If you want to be a warrior, next spring you hunt buffalo."

"He is a Crow!" Chita cried, pointing at his victim, who had gotten to his feet and stood resolutely facing them.

"I am not afraid to fight," the smaller boy said. "But it is not true. I am not a Crow."

"Make them bathe in the river," the priest said to Mina-Yougha. "I will give your eggs to the cook."

Father Mengarini regretted that the children shared these tribal hatreds. Yet as long as the survival of the Flatheads depended upon warfare, even though defensive, that hate was inevitable. When the hunters had left ten days before, Father Mengarini had sent with them every Flathead family that could be spared from the mission work, that they might have fighting strength in case of trouble. For many years the Crows, no less than the Blackfeet, had endeavored to drive the Flatheads out of the buffalo land. A sudden encounter with them meant war, a war that only one man alive could prevent—Pierre Jean DeSmet, who had visited the Crows four years ago and had smoked the calumet of friendship with their chief.

Father Mengarini had his foot on the stoop of the rectory when he heard a woman shriek. He turned about, and almost instantly he saw Indians rushing from huts and buildings, screaming and shouting, "The Blackrobe! The Blackrobe!"

The priest's heart hammered against his breast. He looked in the direction toward which the Flatheads were running. "Their sight is sharper than mine," he thought. He lifted his hand to shade his eyes from the sun. It trembled as if he had been seized with ague. "*Dio mio, Dio mio!*" he repeated. "He is coming!" He began running behind the Indians. "Padre Pierre, Padre

Pierre!" he shouted. The natives were too fast for him. He was out of breath, and a sharp pain in his side forced him to stop. He wiped the tears from his cheeks with his sleeve, scarcely knowing what he did. "Padre Pierre, Padre Pierre!" he shouted again, although he knew that at such a distance his cries were useless.

The men and women had run far ahead of him, beyond the path's end. Now they had encircled the black figure and his horse. Then Father Mengarini saw the figure disappear. "He has dismounted," he thought. "He will never get here." He began running again, stumbling wearily over the path, and when he reached the crowd the Indians made an opening for him.

"Padre Pierre, God bless you!" he cried out, choked with sobs.

The two priests clung to one another until they were able to turn their tears into hearty laughter.

That afternoon they walked among the blue flowers and sapling apple trees, while the Flatheads followed at their heels like devoted dogs.

Father DeSmet caressed the tips of the apple boughs lovingly. He counted the potato plants, and seemed personally offended when the milch cows did not answer his call and come running to meet him.

"Father Gregory, you have done so much. And I—I am like the prodigal son who was not content to stay and care for his father's flock."

"You jest. It is God's care that kept you from the Blackfeet." The Italian twisted a purple aster between his fingers, adding thoughtfully, "But they paid us a visit."

DeSmet looked up quickly. "This time you jest," he said.

"I wish that you were right. We pulled twenty-seven arrows out of Paul's body before we buried him."

"And the others?"

"He was the only Flathead killed. It was during the summer hunt a year ago, and a Pend d'Oreille camp had joined us. They lost only three. Yet the enemy outnumbered us four to one, and twenty-three Blackfeet lay dead when the skirmish was over."

Father DeSmet said nothing. It was not the first time that the Flatheads had won against tremendous odds. In 1840 sixty warriors had withstood the attack of eight hundred Blackfeet. It had taken them five days, but during the terrific strain of those five days they had never ceased to pray.

"Ask, and it shall be granted thee," he thought. Then he said aloud to the Italian, "Father Gregory, if we were to publish the things we know, only Catholics would believe them."

The two men began walking back to the church. Although the sun had already vanished behind the mountains, its glow still lingered on distant peaks, and the sky was that clear burning blue which is found only high up over the clouds.

"You are limping," Father Mengarini said. "Did you hurt your foot?"

"I had a little trouble up north. It doesn't amount to anything," the missionary answered.

The Italian seemed to be turning something over in his mind. His eyes were fastened on the dusty path as if he took some unusual interest in the beetles and ants that scurried across it. All at once he felt Father DeSmet's hand on his shoulder. "You have something to tell me. What is it?"

When Mengarini raised his eyes there were tears in them. "Padre Pierre, it was hard for us—Paul's death. I don't want to lose one other Flathead in a useless war. Neither do I want to lose the friend that has just come back to me."

"Father Gregory, you talk in riddles. All my efforts to be killed by the Blackfeet have failed. They run from me as if I were an army."

"When the hunters left ten days ago I sent every Flathead I could spare because we had rumors that the Crows were after bison. Father, there is only one man alive who could prevent a battle if the tribes were to meet."

Father DeSmet smiled, a small, weary smile. He looked at the proud white buildings beyond the garden, at the saw-mill and flour-mill which had been constructed during his absence, at the foundation which had been laid for the new church. "I understand, Father Gregory. I understand. I will go tomorrow."



"Always it must be that way," Father Mengarini mused. "The hard tasks fall to you because your strength is great. I do the little things."

The next morning Father DeSmet and two Flatheads, the younger Gabriel and Charles, rode into the mountains. They descended steep hills overgrown with laden elderberry bushes, aspen and evergreens. Often in the morning autumn fog concealed the edge of canyon cliffs and they had to go on foot, leading their mounts by the bridle; but before noon the mist would clear and the mountains glow in all their green and yellow splendor.

When they had reached the foothills they came upon an abandoned camp. The tails of a quantity of mountain trout were scattered over the fire bed. Gabriel stumbled upon something in the short grass. It was a worn-out moccasin. He examined it closely. "Father, it belongs to the Blackfeet."

"Then we are not on the trail of the Flatheads?" the priest asked anxiously.

"Yes, Father, we are. Some Blackfeet go with them."

"That is impossible."

"It must be true," the Indian replied. "Last winter after the Blackfoot trouble a trader came to us. He said the Blackfeet were talking about the great medicine we had to make us always win. They wanted to learn our secret. Now they pretend to be friends and go with our men to hunt."

In astonishment Father DeSmet watched Charles as he turned the moccasin over in his hands and then tossed it into a clump of willows. "If the Crows find them together they will kill every man. They know peace between the Flatheads and Blackfeet would mean death for them. They are not strong enough."

Charles nodded. "It is so."

The priest knew that the Indians could travel much faster without him. He therefore decided to send Gabriel ahead that evening to advise the hunters that the Blackrobe was coming. He and Charles promised to follow in the morning.

Gabriel returned late the second night after his departure, riding his mare at full speed. Although the campfire had burned

to embers, Father DeSmet could see by its dim light that the horse was wet with sweat and that foam dripped from her bridle. The Indian's eyes shone with the brightness of anxiety and nervous fatigue.

"Gabriel, you have not slept," the priest said.

"No time to sleep," he answered, panting as he dismounted. "I was a day late."

DeSmet gripped him by the shoulders. "What do you mean?" Then realizing the man's exhaustion, he added, "Never mind now. You must eat something first."

While Charles unsaddled the mare, the priest put fuel on the fire and filled a kettle with water, into which he tossed some fresh meat.

Gabriel sat on the ground. "I tell you now, while the meat is cooking," he said in a tired voice. "It is more than a day's ride to the base of the hills where our people have their tepees. A small band of Blackfeet have joined them and some Nez Percés. They built a big buffalo pen there. After it was all over, Insula told me what happened."

"After what was all over?" the priest asked in fear.

"The trouble. They were met to pray when the Crows came. Our men rushed for their horses, but Insula, he shouted out, 'I forbid you to fight! Let us have peace with them!' The Flatheads obeyed. They held their horses back. But, Father, the Crows were rushing down at full speed. There were hundreds of them. The air was filled with dust. Not one Flathead raised his bow. Not one Flathead drew an arrow from his quiver. They stood by their horses motionless. Then Insula rode out, giving the sign of peace. But the Blackfeet, Father, they did not understand. They saw the Crow chief crack the elkhorn quirt in his hand. Then he pulled his horse up so that it reared, kicking dust in the air. 'Dog!' he yelled at Insula. 'When you are weak you beg for peace. Be killed or command your men to fight!' The Blackfeet could stand it no longer. They sprang to their horses and rushed forth. Insula turned his pony about and forced his way through the rush of oncoming warriors to where our people stood, awaiting his command. Father, it was then that I rode into camp. I

shouted at them. I cried out, 'The Blackrobe is coming!' No one attended, so I rode up to the Crow chief and made the sign of peace. He commanded his men to stop. But the Crows were already driving the Blackfeet back against our people who would not fight. He could not stop them. Some of his warriors lashed them with whips, and finally they rode away."

"Were the losses heavy?" Father DeSmet asked.

"No." Gabriel had taken the half-cooked meat from the kettle and was cooling it in cold water. "Father, do not sleep here. Let us ride on to the camp tonight."

"There is no need of that," Father DeSmet said. "The battle is over."

"I do not know. The Flatheads have taken their women and children out of the camp. They are arming. They think the Crows will return."

"The horses are worn out, and you have had no sleep for two days."

"We must go tonight," Gabriel insisted.

Father DeSmet knew that the Indian was dead tired. The situation must be bad or he would not be so insistent. Consequently, the horses were resaddled, and the men set out at once. Their progress was slow; the animals lagged in spite of repeated urging. They rode all night, but on the following morning they were forced to rest the animals.

On the second day Gabriel cried out in despair, "My horse will drop."

"Leave her and ride with Charles," Father DeSmet advised.

"Not until she falls dead under me," the Indian answered.

On the third day they reached the Flatheads, coming first upon the women who were clustered behind the camp. Shrieking, the squaws ran out to meet them. Their long black hair streamed down their backs in disarray.

Father DeSmet lifted his hand and blessed them. "Where are the men?" he asked.

"They are burying the dead," one woman said.

"The Crows attacked again?"

The women nodded.

"We are too late," Gabriel said. His eyes were bloodshot with sleeplessness.

"We put them to flight," another squaw said. "Fourteen of our men were killed."

Gabriel laughed and slapped the flank of his horse. "We put them to flight!" he cried proudly.

Father DeSmet was thinking of how Father Mengarini did not want to lose one Flathead. Out of pity for his horse he dismounted and walked dejectedly into the camp.

While drums beat that night to the wild, piercing cries of victory, the priest sat before one of the tepees. He watched the women dancing around the fire. They were shaking bells and jumping up and down to the beating of drums and the chanting of the men. The tall victory plumes they wore tossed wildly in cascades of color when they neared the fire, and darkened when they withdrew. "God forbid that it always be so," he thought.

All at once he was aware of someone sitting beside him. Looking up, he saw one of the Blackfeet chiefs.

"Father," he said, speaking in the Salish language, "the prayers of the Flatheads are stronger than arrows. Tell us about this great medicine."

"Tomorrow, when the dancing has stopped, we will talk about it together, with all the Blackfeet to hear us."

The Indian assented with a gesture.

The two men sat side by side in silence, watching the dancers. When the noise had subsided a little the priest turned to the Blackfoot. "It is not a medicine for war," he said. "It is a medicine for peace."

It was strange, this new friendship with the Blackfeet, Father DeSmet thought, a dark, savage kind of friendship. It was not the way he had wanted it, nor what he had dreamed of in the dead snow-wastes of Canada. Nonetheless, he knew it was God's way, and would therefore bear good fruit.



## VI

### Death by Cholera Comes in Strange Ways

1849

#### I

Toward the end of 1846 poverty threatened the Rocky Mountain missions. Father DeSmet, therefore, returned to St. Louis for the purpose of soliciting funds. The trip down the Missouri was a discouraging one. For miles on either side of the old Potawatomi village the tents of the Mormons who were moving west whitened the bluffs. Settlers had begun to invade the flat prairie lands beyond the river. "They are not going to the Bitter Root Valley," the priest told himself. Yet he was uneasy.

With an enthusiasm bordering on desperation he threw all his energies into the task before him. However, when the money had been collected another priest was sent to the Rocky Mountains in his place. Disappointed and perplexed, Father DeSmet remained in St. Louis. He felt strangely isolated at the university where the problems of education and administration absorbed his fellow Jesuits. As he walked down the halls or across the campus, he could see little groups of priests whispering to one another, studying him curiously. "When are you going back to the Indians?" they would ask from time to time. He would look searchingly into the faces of these younger men, hoping to find a shadow of sympathy. They were bantering him, he knew that, but he had been some months among them before he discovered the cause.

His first book, *Letters and Sketches*, had been published in 1843. In writing the story of the Oregon missions he had hoped that he might make it possible for others to share his dream. It

was to this book that the young Jesuit, a new instructor in philosophy at the university, referred when he said, "Father Pierre, I want you to know that I believe the things you have written."

"You believe them!" Father DeSmet exclaimed incredulously. The young man flushed.

In a flash the missionary understood. "Are they saying that I have lied?"

The other priest was abashed. Apparently it had not occurred to him that Father DeSmet was unaware of the rumors. "Oh, no," he said hastily, attempting to make amends. "But one is always tempted to exaggerate."

The conversation had ended abruptly. But thereafter the missionary understood the sly glances and muffled conversations. He understood why he was kept in St. Louis. He was in disfavor with the Society. It was not the personal mortification, the injustice of such suspicion, which tormented him night and day. It was the realization that his dream of reviving the Paraguayan missions must inevitably crumble. Without the confidence of his colleagues, he could do nothing.

During the long, monotonous, black days that followed, Father DeSmet sought relief from his despair among the citizens of St. Louis. Hard-headed business men who were not interested in converting the Indians admired the courage of this vigorous priest; and Catholic women who would have shrunk from admitting a Flathead into their parlors became sentimentally enthusiastic over the possibility of transforming the savages into saints.

Later Father DeSmet was glad for the long respite of a year in Europe on business. He was glad for the shorter one of a visit among the Sioux tribes of the upper Missouri. He was even grateful to be sent to Cincinnati for a few months early in 1849, when the first wave of gold-seekers was sweeping west. He had been made Procurator of the Vice-Province, a strange position for a missionary priest whose heart was in the wilderness. Nevertheless, it kept him busy at dull tasks which deadened the pain of his disappointment.

He had booked passage for his return from Cincinnati on the *Niagara*. Like all Mississippi River steamboats, the vessel, being propelled by a high-pressure engine, snorted loudly at each stroke of the piston. Ever since leaving Louisville the priest had found it difficult to sleep at night because of the noise. Now, on the last morning of his journey, he rolled over in his berth, only half-conscious of the familiar, rhythmic snorting. Then he sat up in bed. Two men were talking outside his cabin door.

"They told me I couldn't buy mules in St. Louis," one man said.

"They're damn liars. I'd rather pay double when I outfit than be charged with freight from Pittsburgh."

"It's not that. It's the cholera."

There was a momentary pause, the kind of silence that always followed any mention of the pestilence.

"I'll get my mules all right," the second man said.

Footsteps were hurrying back and forth across the saloon. Fully awake by this time, the priest began dressing. The steamboat had stopped near a sandbar the night before, and after dark, when the dancers, card players, and drinkers had returned to their cabins, two corpses had been lowered into a boat and buried in the sand. Father DeSmet had thought the graves were too shallow, but the captain said that the river current would wash the bodies out anyway. As he dressed he wondered how many of the passengers knew. Well, they would learn the truth soon enough once the boat docked, and barring accidents they should reach St. Louis by noon. The journey had been a long one. He thought wearily of his room at the university. There would be letters to answer, account books to check, and endlessly repeated discussions of money.

After repeating his morning prayers, the priest fastened the girdle of his cassock and opened the door.

The washroom, which was located near the paddle-box, was crowded. A burly, full-bearded man had buried his face in the dirtiest of the two jack-towels stretched on the roller.

"If you outfit in St. Louis they'll strip you clean of your

last dime," he grumbled through the towel. "I'm goin' to Westport."

Another man, sprawled in a chair, detained the Negro barber long enough to reply. "I got the goods straight. I got it from a fellow who was in St. Louis last year. You have to take what they've got at Westport because it's the last town."

"Mebbe so," the burly man replied, reaching for the common toothbrush, which dangled from a brass chain above one of the basins. As he did so, he glanced in the mirror and saw the priest. He turned around. "Say, you're from St. Louis, ain't you?"

Father DeSmet laughed. "Yes."

"What are they sellin' oxen for up there?"

"That depends on the ox."

"Where's the comb?" a man shouted. "I been here ten minutes, and no chance to wash."

"He's deaf," the burly man explained. "That's why he yells so. You don't think I'm goin' to buy a sick ox, do you? I ain't aimin' to be buried in the canyons."

"They were about forty dollars a yoke last fall," DeSmet answered quietly. "I don't know what they're selling for this spring."

"Who's got the comb?" the deaf man shouted again.

"You might be able to take care of yourself," an Irishman yelled into his ear, at the same time pulling the comb from his hip pocket. "There's fifty other men who've got to use this room."

"Forty dollars for a yoke of oxen ain't bad. One day in the diggin's will pay for it."

"Why don't you give the priest a chance to wash?" someone asked.

"Hell, this is a free country," a man at one of the three wash-basins retorted. "I ain't no fish-eater."

One of the men moved away, making room for Father DeSmet. He washed briefly and applied the dirtiest towel to his face. It was soggy and had a sour smell.



The burly man looked at him with admiration. "Say, you're the first priest I ever saw who would use a filthy rag like that one."

Father DeSmet's eyes twinkled. "This is a free country, even for a fish-eater."

The men laughed rudely. "You're all right," one of them said. "When I get back from the diggin's with some gold, I'll buy you a couple of drinks."

"I wouldn't be swearin' that to the Lord," the Irishman put in.

"What are you goin' for then, if there ain't no gold?"

"I'm not going. I'm after buying land in Missouri."

The burly man had removed one of his shoes and was polishing it with the towel which DeSmet had used on his face. "Listen to that!" he scoffed. "Free gold in California and he spends his money for a farm. You got chills thinkin' of the trip mebbe."

"I'm not caring if you want to think that."

"Gold is a gamble," the priest suggested, "but the land lasts forever."

"It's no lie, holy Father," the Irishman mused. "My mother wouldn't have bartered one yellow cow for all the gold in the world."

A groan came from the barber's chair. "You're a bright cuss, you are. If your old lady could have traded one cow for all the gold in California, she could have bought back that cow and twenty thousand more."

"What blessing would that be?" Father DeSmet asked. "She couldn't manage to milk them all."

The burly man closed one eye and squinted at the priest with the other. "I like you. Goddamn it, I do, but I don't git no sense from the things you say."

"Many people don't," the Jesuit answered.

The saloon was filled with passengers kept indoors by the cold March drizzle. After breakfast Father DeSmet made his way among groups of excited men and women and restless children to a vacant chair in the corner. The frequent sound

of the *Niagara's* fog horn and the prompt return of her salutes told him that traffic was heavy. At both Cincinnati and Louisville the wharves had been crowded with produce, and all day steamboats had been arriving from the East or leaving for the West.

For the last six months "gold" had been the one word bandied from mouth to mouth. The rise of anti-Catholic nativism had been forgotten; the activities of the abolitionists became insignificant. Merchants were selling property at half its value and moving west.

As Father DeSmet sat watching the other passengers he caught bits of conversation. A pompous gentleman in a white waistcoat and pea-green trousers was entertaining a group of ladies by claiming that California was the Ophir of the Scriptures, from which the ships of Solomon had returned laden with precious ore.

"There's proof for such an assertion," he maintained. "Those ships were three and a half years on the high seas. Think of it—three and a half years! China and Africa were not so far away. They must have gone to California. Ophir, my dear ladies, Ophir is the treasure-box of the world."

One lady tittered. "Isn't it romantic?"

"I'm glad Solomon's slaves didn't get all the gold," another said.

A little man, who was as bald as an egg, joined the group. "Let the other guys do the diggin' and you git the gold. That's what I says. I tried the same thing in the lead mines."

"What are you talking about?" the gentleman in the white waistcoat asked.

"I'm goin' to buy whisky cheap in St. Louis and sell it high at the diggin's. That's one trade that can't fail."

"Really!" one of the ladies murmured, turning her back. The others followed and the gentleman did likewise, leaving the bald-headed fellow alone.

Two matrons in stiff brocades and morning caps sat next to the priest.

"The best way to prevent cholera," one of them said, "is

to burn a piece of limestone and carry it in your apron pocket, or just string it around your neck."

"Well, I never heard of that," the other said. "My nephew in Sandusky came down with it last fall. The doctor said it was from eating cabbage."

The first woman patted her friend on the arm. "Don't you believe it, dearie. That doctor didn't know what he was talking about."

"My nephew got well."

"Maybe he didn't have cholera at all, just stomach-ache."

"We gave him Doctor McClintock's Diarrhea Cordial."

"Well, you don't say! Just the same, if he'd had some limestone about him, he wouldn't have took sick in the first place."

"He vomited something terrible."

"It sounds like stomach-ache to me."

Father DeSmet got up and walked across the saloon. An old man in tattered clothes tapped his arm. "Is it true someone was buried last night?"

"I'm afraid so," the priest replied.

The old man looked frightened. "Tell me, was it cholera?"

"A man of your age shouldn't be afraid. You've lived a long life, my friend."

"I know—I know—but cholera! It isn't dying. It's dying of that!" He shuddered.

"The Irish are to blame!" a voice behind the priest said emphatically. "Coming over here on account of the potato famine."

Father DeSmet turned about and noticed two men talking together.

One of them, a well-dressed Englishman, was picking particles of lint from his coat sleeve. "There's plenty of room," he murmured.

"Yes, plenty of room," his companion snapped. "Room for Irish cholera and Irish priests! Room, I suppose, in Washington for the Pope instead of the President!"

"I'm not so sure."

"*The Secrets of the Confessional!* There's a book you ought to read. You'll get the whole story."

"About the potato famine?" the Englishman asked.

"No, about papists."

Father DeSmet went outside.

A flatboat or "broad horn" was floating down the river, blurred behind a curtain of rain. The steersman guiding the sweeps wore a red bandanna around his neck, the one bright spot on the gray water. Leaning against the door where he was protected from the rain, the priest watched him. He recalled his conversation with Dr. McLoughlin on his first visit to Fort Vancouver. How confident he had been then that civilization would never cross the Rockies, and now the Eastern cities were spilling their inhabitants into those very regions which he had coveted for Christianity. And what men and women! Not God-fearing Christians hoping to find homes, but speculators, whisky traders, down-and-outers whose one desire was to plunder the land of its wealth. And he was condemned to stay helplessly in St. Louis, burdened with the financial affairs of the vice-province. A Jesuit, he told himself again and again, is not to question the orders he receives, but obey. At first, after his freedom in the wilderness, he had remained in the city willingly, believing that the routine of office work would afford him a much-needed discipline. Yet at times he wondered if this spiritual penance would never end. Once the Father General had written to one of his colleagues at the university: "The Society cannot take charge of all the countries to which Father DeSmet's taste for traveling would carry him." He had lain awake many nights pondering that sentence. Surely the Father General did not understand. The distance from Rome to Brussels was no farther than that between two Indian camps. Was it possible to sit behind a desk in Rome and comprehend the problems of the American missions? He had tried to explain but had failed miserably. They had doubted the truth of his stories. They had made him a prisoner in St. Louis. They had forbidden him to return to the mountains, and if the gold fever continued, it would soon be too late. Deep wagon ruts would cut



across the Bitter Root Valley; they would cut into the lives of his Indians. They would make scars that only the grace of God could heal. Father DeSmet had long ago ceased to dream of a succession of quiet native villages nestled in the mountains, of bronze-backed men reaping golden grain to the tune of Latin hymns, or of pack-trains carrying baskets of wine and fruits from one mission to another. Now he thought only of saving the Flatheads from imminent disaster, of visiting the Coeur d'Alenes once more, and of sleeping in the tepees of the Blackfeet. And for a man already forty-eight years old, even such wishes might not be realized.

Shortly after midday St. Louis appeared on the west bank of the Mississippi. Rain beat the smoke of factories and foundries back upon the roofs of the buildings, smothering the city with soot. The river was dotted with flatboats and barges, and the tall smokestacks of idle steamboats made a formidable barrier along the water front. Father DeSmet counted thirty-five of them. The emigrants began crowding the deck of the *Niagara*, the men carrying portmanteaus, bundles of clothing and boxes. Huddled under black parasols, the women divided their attention between the children and the soot-veiled levee. The continuous roar of the fog horn made conversation impossible. Two hundred silent faces were turned toward the city.

It was difficult to make one's way to the street, for the levee was piled high with produce. Some of it was protected by tarpaulins, but great stacks of furs, bundles of shovels, syrup barrels, calicoes, and linens lay exposed to the weather. Father DeSmet pushed through a medley of people—Negroes, hawkers, freckle-faced Mulattoes with red hair, Creoles with narrow eyebrows and incredible lashes, Indians dressed like trappers, and trappers as coffee-colored as the Indians—past the long line of cabs waiting to take the travelers to hotels, past two-wheeled carts laden with firewood and water barrels, past the flies which swarmed over decayed vegetable matter embedded in the muddy streets. In the few months of his absence St. Louis had changed. Everything was noise, bustle, excitement. Men stood in the rain shouting out their wares: beads, scissors, and cutlery for sale

cheap to be traded to the Indians; castor oil offered at a dollar per gallon and guaranteed to keep gold-seekers in health; pickled pork, mule harnesses, knife belts, and flour in waterproof sacks were all advertised by shouting merchants.

The streets, habitually littered with filth and debris, had been turned by the heavy rains into quagmires of stinking mud. A wet, sour stench seeped out of dark alleys. Under the curbs ran streams of offensive water, rain mingled with the waste cast out from neighboring houses.

In spite of the bad weather a crowd had gathered at the east door of the courthouse. Near the auctioneer's stand half a dozen Negroes waited to be sold. A prospective purchaser, in beaver hat and figured scarf-tie, was examining a strong young buck much as an equestrian might examine a piece of horseflesh, prodding his biceps with the end of an umbrella. Then a Negress was put on the block.

"A good sound wench," the crier shouted. "Sixteen years old. She's a good cook, and a good washer. She has got religion."

No one put in a bid, although the girl was comely enough, her orange cotton dress lending a golden glow to her skin and enhancing the leopard-like grace of her body.

As Father DeSmet neared the crowd, he heard some coarse remarks made by a group of men in the rear.

"Guaranteed an obedient slave for life!" the auctioneer cried. "Sixteen years old and in sound health."

The girl seemed to disregard the crowd, keeping her expressionless eyes on the unsold Negroes nearby.

Father DeSmet had quickened his pace, eager to leave the courthouse behind him. He walked up Market Street, where uncovered butcher stalls offered rain-soaked slabs of meat for sale and the smell from open barrels of mackerel clung to the wet air. Then he turned north toward St. Louis University.

Everywhere signs hanging above doorways and under second-story windows told him that the city was losing no opportunity to grow fat on the gold hunger. Messrs. Bears and Brothers were advertising "California Gold Washers;" Kennett, Simons and Company, "buck shot and small bar lead to emi-

grants," Mr. Nickol, "California outfits: heavy coats, pants, vests, shirts, drawers, and gun coats." The priest paused before the shop of an acquaintance, Mr. T. Gray. "California bedsteads," his sign read. "Speculate by sending them among the gold diggers."

The merchant, thinking at first that he had a customer, put his grizzly head out of the doorway and eyed the priest over the rims of his spectacles. "So it's you, Father DeSmet," he said in surprise. "Come in and get warm."

Father DeSmet stood in a small, poorly lighted shop. Piles of iron bedsteads lay on every side of him, and in one corner a dusty, dilapidated roll-top desk was littered with papers. The merchant shoved a piece of wood into the stove.

"Come here by the fire. It's chilly out. You must have come on the *Niagara*."

"I did. St. Louis has gone mad."

Mr. Gray chuckled. "It's really money this time. This is the best thing that's happened. Can you believe it, sixty-four barrels of whisky and twenty-one barrels of castor oil sold yesterday. Profits, Father! It's unbelievable."

"Where did you get this idea?" Father DeSmet pointed to the bedstead.

"I just got to thinking that most emigrants hate sleeping on the wagon-floor. Come here. I want to show you how it works." He leaned over one of the pieces; by pushing a lever and pulling an iron rod under the spring, he converted the bedstead into a sofa.

"That's ingenious," the priest said.

"It's the best thing I've seen." Gray's voice was filled with pride. "It weighs just twenty-six pounds and can be packed on a mule. You sleep in it on the plains and when you get to the diggin's you have the most important part of your parlor furniture. If the farmers bring in enough mules to carry them, I'll be rich in a year." He patted the bedstead, which was now a sofa, lovingly. "You remember that last winter Skellman was well-nigh broke?"

"He had a pretty bad time and sickness besides."

"Well, you should see him now. Selling maps. That's what he's doing. Just selling maps, Jellerson's *Great Map of the Road from Independence to California*, at three dollars each. He can't get them in fast enough. He keeps a hawker at the levee and three men in his store. He's even talking about buying a Nigger."

"It's hard to tell how long the rush will last."

Gray sat down on the swivel chair at his desk, clasping his hands behind his neck. "It will last a long time if we can keep the cholera away."

"How bad is it?"

"They're dying pretty fast down at the Barracks. But there's not much of it in town."

Father DeSmet walked to the window and looked out. "Why don't they clean the streets? The city smells like a cess-pool."

"Clean the streets!" Gray exclaimed indignantly. "Who? When? We haven't got time to sleep these days. There'll be plenty of time to clean the city after the emigrants have all gone west."

The priest sighed. "They're expecting me at the university. I'm glad things are turning out well for you." As he stood in the doorway, he added, "By the way, if you see Skellman, tell him to save one of those maps for me. I can make good use of it when I return to the mountains."

A number of students were lingering by the high brick wall that enclosed the university. Father DeSmet saw them long before he reached the corner. He was tired and wished to go directly to his room. He pulled his hat over his forehead, turned the collar of his coat up to hide his long, gray hair, and walked rapidly, hoping that he would not be recognized. Once inside the enclosure he slipped behind one of the brick buildings and mounted a back stairway to his room. It was just as he had left it—the bed, the chair, and the work table. His head throbbed, a dull ache which came from worry and which could be cured only by prayer. "A little later," he thought, "in an hour, perhaps, I will go to see Father Elet."



Father John Anthony Elet had been made vice-provincial in 1848. He was a thin, delicate man who had suffered an affection of the lungs since youth, and although he had repeatedly asked to be sent to the Oregon missions, he had been retained at the university. A sedentary life did not agree with him. He coughed frequently, and in moments of excitement an unhealthy flush tinged the customary pallor of his face.

"God bless you!" he said when Father DeSmet entered his office. "I sent the carriage to the levee, but the driver returned saying you had not come."

"I wanted to walk," Father DeSmet said. "I wanted to see the new St. Louis."

Father Elet leaned back in his chair. "What do you think of it?"

"I think that in ten years the Oregon missions will be gone."

The vice-provincial raised his brows. "Well, you have grown pessimistic, my dear Father."

"The United States began as a nation, Father Provincial. She has turned into a money bag, and fools have got hold of the purse-strings."

"You were too long on the steamboat. One sees the worst side of everything on a river trip."

DeSmet shook his head. "No, it isn't that. I saw it in Cincinnati and in Louisville. I saw it everywhere."

"Saw what?" Elet inquired.

"This madness—foolish talk of nunnery scandals, uncontrolled enthusiasm about the European revolutions, the increasing hatred of Americans toward aliens. Why, since the Holy Father's flight to Gaeta, Protestant papers have promulgated the idea that he may establish his Vatican on the frontier."

"That's ridiculous!" the vice-provincial scoffed.

"You and I know that, but it's dangerous."

Father Elet turned away and coughed. The flush came to his cheeks. "It will pass, it will pass. The Oregon missions are a thousand miles from Sutter's Mill."

"The same abolitionists who preach freedom for the slaves rant about driving the papists out of the country."

"Did you have cholera on the boat?"

"Two deaths. How bad is it here?"

"We can't find out. The newspapers are pretty quiet. They don't want to stop the trade."

"If they don't clean the streets, the cholera will stop it quickly enough."

Elet had never seen Father DeSmet so discouraged. He who had always laughed heartily and trusted in God's care had suddenly become—well, almost misanthropic. He thought it unbecoming in a Jesuit. The flush on the vice-provincial's cheeks became a deep crimson and spread to his forehead. He had a matter to discuss with the missionary which he disliked very much—a delicate matter.

"Father Pierre," he began, coughing slightly, "I have something to tell you. It is a temporary trouble, I am sure. Perhaps already the difficulty has been settled." He paused and coughed again before continuing. "Father Gregory has been having trouble with the Flatheads."

DeSmet drew back as if he had been slapped in the face. "Trouble with the Flatheads!"

"Yes."

"The Blackfeet?"

"No, no, something quite different. After the fall hunt they refused to return to the village. He wrote Father Ravalli, and we had the news indirectly. They've taken up their old-time barbarous yells and come only occasionally to Mass with the priests. They seem to be estranged. They even refused to sell meat to the mission."

Every word that the Jesuit spoke struck Father DeSmet like a physical blow. "What happened?" he asked. The words were spoken in a voice which Elet had never heard before.

The vice-provincial held out his left hand and examined his fingernails. He bit his underlip nervously. "Did you—" he began slowly, "have you, not intentionally, but thoughtlessly perhaps, made promises which the fathers could not fulfill?"

Father DeSmet was thunderstruck. "Who has brought those charges?"

"Please, Father Pierre. They are not charges. We are all guilty of indiscretions. Ravalli only seeks an explanation for what has happened. He feels no ill-will toward you."

The desk between the two men seemed to widen, separating them, and over that impenetrable distance silence was a thick fog.

When the vice-provincial spoke again his tone was so kindly, so sympathetic that it pinched the missionary's heart. "There is a small incident, I believe, when you promised tobacco to the Flatheads and withheld it for a peace offering to the Blackfeet."

"I divided the tobacco equally between them."

"Savages do not reason subtly," Father Elet said. "They go from the particular to the universal . . ."

"I understand the Indian." DeSmet's reply came tartly, and he regretted it at once. The long discipline of a Jesuit ends in the control of anger. "I'm sorry," he added, "but the Flatheads are my only witnesses, and I cannot bring them here."

"Your word is better than that of any witness," Father Elet said.

When the missionary returned to his room he sighed heavily and sat down at his work table. Covering his face with his hands, he tried to think clearly, tried to push back the lonely waves of desolation that inundated him, tried to curb the rebellious desire to leave at once, to make his way into the mountains and let the welcome of his old friends of the Bitter Root Valley dispel every doubt. Something was wrong, something was unexplained. Father Gregory had magnified some passing mood of the Indians. Perhaps the Flatheads had committed a peccadillo and were afraid to confess it. If only Father Gregory would write. Perhaps he had written. He began feverishly going through the unopened mail on his table. There were letters from Europe, from Philadelphia, from New Orleans, and from Boston, most of them from Catholics who had read his book. Some contained money; all promised prayers. But Father Gregory had not written.

As he shuffled the correspondence into order again, he saw the corner of an envelope protruding from the bottom of the

pile. It was postmarked, "*Roma, Italia.*" A letter from the Father General! He pulled it out and, forgetting to use his paper knife, tore open the envelope. Yes, Father Roothaan had written a long letter. DeSmet read it, his mouth gradually tightening and his hands trembling a little. He read it a second time, and then a third. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me," he said aloud, the petition ending in a sob. He took the letter and started to Elet's office, but halfway down the corridor he changed his mind and returned. He sat on the edge of his bed, shaking as though ill. Then he knelt and prayed. The prayer gave him strength. If it did not bring peace, at least it dulled the sharp pain in his heart. Quite calm at last, he walked into the office of the vice-provincial.

Father Elet looked up from his work. The expression on the missionary's face startled him. "Father, you are ill."

"I am quite all right, Father Provincial," DeSmet answered, moving unsteadily toward the empty chair.

Elet watched him anxiously. "I'm afraid you are exaggerating the seriousness of this matter."

"No. I have faith in my children."

"It was thoughtless of me to mention it until you had rested from your trip."

DeSmet seemed not to hear him. He sat holding the letter in his hand and staring into the gray oblong of the window behind Elet's back. Rain lashed at the pane, driven spasmodically by gusts of wind. In the dim half-light of the room the missionary's face was ghastly white. "Father Provincial, I have come to resign my post as procurator of the vice-province." The sentence was measured, as if he spoke each word with difficulty.

"Father Pierre, you are ill. We will talk about this tomorrow."

"I am quite all right. I have come to resign . . ."

Elet was disconcerted. He had not expected this reaction. "I know you wish to return to the Flatheads," he said gently, "but your resignation would not leave you free. I will do what I can."



"You do not understand. It is something else. The Father General has written me a letter—I must resign."

The hopelessness in DeSmet's eyes held the vice-provincial's attention.

"Father Provincial, I am accused of offending against holy poverty and of dispensing funds as though the management of money were my own affair."

Father Elet was seized with a fit of coughing. He covered his face with a blood-stained handkerchief and coughed violently. After the attack had passed he laid the handkerchief on the desk. "I am coughing too much blood lately," he said. "You see, Father Pierre, we each have our dark hours. I shall not live much longer."

"May the Lord keep you with us," DeSmet said.

"I appointed you procurator last year because I have confidence in your ability to handle money. Under the circumstances, I cannot accept your resignation."

"But the displeasure of the Father General . . ."

"Is a misunderstanding."

"Rome is so small," DeSmet said, as if talking to himself. "Would they understand if I told them that I have made three journeys from the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis without spending a dollar except for the small sum I paid my guide, that during four months I traveled three thousand miles and my expenses amounted to fifty dollars? In Paris I dined on two pennies' worth of chestnuts. When I went from Marseilles to Rome I ate only a piece of bread and some meat which I bought before embarking. I have not broken my vow of poverty. The good Lord knows."

"You need not defend yourself to me," Father Elet said. "This misunderstanding can be corrected. The Father General is a just man. Father Pierre, go to your room and rest. Please. Tomorrow write the Father General what you have just told me. The matter, I am sure, will end there."

"I know that our strength consists in a knowledge of our weaknesses. But, Father Provincial, the Flatheads—I cannot be-

lieve that I have alienated them—and as for the money, I have given it only to God.”

“I also know that. I shall write Rome today.”

Father DeSmet bowed his head and sat motionless, like an old man. “Like a man who has lived two lives and does not die,” Father Elet thought.

Rain blew against the window, making a sound like that of birds beating their wings in fear. The damp chill of it crept into the half-lighted room where the two men sat, each offering his own prayer to God.

2

In the days that followed it seemed to Father DeSmet that he had reached the nadir of a circle which was his life. The world outside blossomed, but no stars mitigated the darkness within. For the first time his knees became bruised from the *prie-dieu*. For the first time he tasted the bitter meaning of the Saviour’s words, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Except for the sad kindness of Father Elet, who lived in the shadow of death, and Brother John, who through love had attached himself to the missionary almost in the capacity of a servant, Father DeSmet felt that he was an alien at the university. He no longer mentioned his work among the Indians to the other priests. If anyone brought up the subject, he could feel the covert glances and the smirks behind his back. “They are only human,” he tried to tell himself. “God forgive me, if I have judged them.” As a boy in Termonde, always with a sense of his own impotence, he had watched the fishing smacks sail out to sea at twilight and return at dawn. So now he seemed to wander along a dead shore, gathering useless mussel-shells and driftwood and wild sea-clover while others returned from their labor with full seines.

During the month of April boats continued to come, bringing gold-seekers from the East and refugees from Europe. Worse than slave ships those steamboats were, laden to the rails; and behind the boilers men, women, and children were packed like cattle in slaughter pens. And every boat stopped

many times between New Orleans and St. Louis to bury the dead.

On the levee day after day the priest wandered among stevedores and hawkers, chatted with shopkeepers and peddlers, and always searched the faces of the emigrants as they disembarked, hunting for the fair hair, bright coloring, and direct glance of the Flemish. From them he received news of his country. From him they took money and help. He felt a great compassion for these people, as if his suffering and theirs sprang from a single source; and when he spoke to them in their own tongue, all the bells of Flanders sounded in his voice.

The citizens of St. Louis loved Father DeSmet. They did not doubt his stories. If he lifted the iron knocker of an imposing French mansion, the slave greeted him with a smile and the mistress opened her reticule almost before he made his request.

"Madame de Mun," he would say, "I come only because you are a saint. I need your help."

Isabelle de Mun believed that with every opportunity for charity she purchased a measure of God's grace. Her father had been a refugee in Switzerland, her husband had fled to England to save himself from the guillotine, and later they had starved in Cuba. She too had known suffering, and now a widow, with the wealth of sugar and coffee plantations in the West Indies, she could at least relieve the misfortunes of others. Her eyes would brighten at Father DeSmet's request; the bosom under her bodice would lift a bit. "What can I do?"

"Last week *La Belle Creole* brought a Flemish family. The parents and four of the children had already taken sick with cholera. Two days ago the father died, yesterday the mother and one child. There are eight orphans."

"It is a privilege, Father DeSmet."

She, however, was not alone in her willingness. There was Pierre Chouteau, Jr., in his ninety-first year, as frail as a white-haired dandelion ready to go with the first wind. There was the eccentric Bryan Mullanphy, whose French education had tempered his Irish fire. There was also the Quaker-born Edward Bates; and Robert A. Barnes, who hid his generosity in

a deep hole and lived as unnoticed as the rabbits beyond the last town shanty.

The trees along the cobblestone avenues had flowered. The French gardens became a tangle of gaudy petals and dusty bees. Quails fed on the city lawns. But where the offal from the houses was cast upon the ubiquitous mud of the streets, flies bred by thousands, and beyond breweries, distilleries, oil and white lead factories, an evil scum had formed over Chouteau's Pond, the slop-bowl of St. Louis, so that the Irish and Germans who lived in that neighborhood complained of the breeze bringing a fetid odor into their homes.

Cholera had slipped into the west and southeast sections of the city, but the business district was free of it. Men became grim and tight-lipped, they made remarks about foreigners who were dirty and brought the disease, they sprinkled chloride and quicklime in their yards, but withal they were getting rich. While emigrants crowded cheap hotels and boardinghouses, or slept in open camps beyond the confines of the city, the men who had made St. Louis what it was sipped their champagne and became heady with the fragrant ribbons and silk curls beside them. Like waterlilies flourishing among the scum on a stagnant pool, they flourished in spite of the filth and disease which spread over the poorer, more congested neighborhoods.

On Sundays when the doors of the cathedral were opened for Mass, carriages paraded haughtily down Walnut Street, patent leather horses holding their heads high. The blackamoors who rode behind in their gay liveries looked like red and yellow butterflies. No fault of Archbishop Kenrick was it that the cashmere shawls and brocaded vests left little room for the wanderers going west. And why indeed should anyone complain? These ladies in velvet bonnets, these gentlemen in beaver hats, had made the cathedral possible. Indeed, they and their fathers had built St. Louis. For them were the imported bells, the elaborate candlesticks, the embroidered antependium covering the altar, and the six paintings which had been given by the King of France.



Father DeSmet visited the cathedral only on feast days, when the Jesuits in black cassocks and white surplices assisted at Mass. Ordinarily he preferred the college church. Yet, if he did not pray with the millionaires of the city, he dined at their homes, shared their mint juleps, and returned their hospitality by telling them the Indian tales he dared not mention to the priests.

So it happened on one evening in the mansion of Monsieur Gratiot, after the ladies had retired to the garden for coffee, that the men lingered around the table, smoking and drinking wine.

They had talked about the new steamboat *Matilda*, which French & Company were building to be sent around Cape Horn, the first full-rigged vessel ever to leave the St. Louis yards.

James G. Barry, the mayor, puffed his cigar with a wise indulgence in his face. "I am willing to give my best champagne for the *Matilda's* christening," he said, "but I'll wager she doesn't make two trips around the Horn."

Across the glitter of silver and glassware a face flushed with anger. "The *Matilda*, Mayor Barry, is as seaworthy as any boat built east of the Mississippi. I believe you are not well informed."

"I beg your pardon—permit me to explain. I cast no reflections on French & Company, but within five years there will be a railroad to the coast."

The diamond studs on Bryan Mullanphy's waistcoat flashed. "Have you ever ridden the cars?" he asked.

The mayor had not.

"It would be impossible to put a line through to the coast. Don't you agree, Father DeSmet?"

"I fear, Bryan, that 'impossible' is not a word in the American vocabulary."

"Well, I went from Albany to Buffalo on the cars once," Mullanphy continued. "I had to change from one line to another so often that when I got to Buffalo three pieces of baggage were missing. Every five or six miles the engine broke down, and when we were actually moving, the passengers were at-

tacked by a shower of sparks. The cars are uncomfortable, noisy, dangerous."

"What we need in crossing the plains is not comfort, but speed," the mayor said.

"Have you forgotten the Rocky Mountains?" DeSmet inquired.

Charles Gratiot, the host, was asking the black butler to refill the priest's glass.

"Monsieur, I have had enough," the missionary protested. "If I drink too heartily in St. Louis I shall find it difficult to live on coffee in Oregon."

"Then you are going back?" the mayor asked.

"Sometime, I hope."

"If the mayor is right," Gratiot suggested, "there will be no wilderness, Father. You may buy your favorite brand at the mountain wine-shops."

"That would not be good fortune for me," DeSmet said. "May I change my mind after all and have another glass? Your conversation is disturbing."

"This is not idle talk. We are going to have a convention, if I can get the support of you gentlemen."

Everyone turned at the mayor's remark. "A convention?"

"Yes, to discuss a national railroad. Benton will handle the organizing. As a courtesy to the Illinois delegates we can put Stephen Douglas up as chairman. If every city represented will subscribe, the thing can be done."

Father DeSmet frowned. "Where will your railroad run?"

"From St. Louis to San Francisco, with a branch connecting the Columbia River."

The Jesuit tasted his wine, but the flavor was gone.

"I don't think it will work," Mullanphy said. "The rush to California will be over in a year. Do you think the gold supply is endless?"

"I'm not so sure," Father DeSmet put in. "Before the California rush is over, someone will discover gold in the Black Hills."

Charles Gratiot looked at the priest shrewdly. "In the Black Hills?"

"In the Black Hills," the missionary repeated so earnestly that all the faces around the table were struck with amazement. For a moment the only sound in the room was the slave as he moved from place to place refilling the glasses.

"Are you serious?" someone asked.

"I have known about it for a good many years."

The mayor was skeptical. "How did you find out?"

"I discovered it quite by accident, digging into the side of a mountain. It was a big vein."

The fingers of Charles Gratiot were bloodless where he pressed the stem of his wine-glass. "Where is it? Where is it?"

"I covered it up again," the priest said wistfully, as if he regretted the intense eagerness of his companions.

"For God's sake, tell us where it is!" The mayor almost shouted in his excitement.

Father DeSmet shook his head. "No, I will never tell anyone."

"Why, you're crazy," Gratiot muttered in exasperation.

"Your railroads and gold-seekers and cities would ruin my Indians," the priest said, smiling faintly.

The light from the candelabra was less bright than the eyes of Monsieur Gratiot's guests.

"You may as well tell us," Bryan Mullanphy urged, trying to hide his rising anger. "Someone will find it anyhow."

"No, I do not want to bear that guilt, not even for my friends."

Gratiot thrummed on the table nervously. "Father, you are mistaken if you think you can save the Indians by keeping your secret. They are doomed."

Father DeSmet pressed his lips together. "Only God can prophesy, Monsieur Gratiot. I leave the matter in His hands."

The cigar smoke in the room was heavy, but the unspoken thoughts of the men were heavier still.

"What can you do for the Indians anyway?" the mayor

asked. He had never shared the indulgence of the others for the missionary's work.

Father DeSmet's lips curled slightly. "Monsieur, truly I do not know. A long time ago when I was young, I thought that they could be isolated from all contact with the Americans. It was done once in Paraguay. Perhaps it was a dream. But, Monsieur, already they have learned to be good Christians, better than we are. When your fur traders and gold-seekers and settlers come, the little world we have started to build will crumble."

In the pause that followed Gratiot felt he must say something to dispel the irritation. But his choice was an unlucky one. "Josephine Moreau has cholera," he said.

Josephine Moreau! It was impossible. They had believed and prayed that the pestilence would remain in the lower sections of town. Irritation turned to fear.

In the loneliness of those unhappy days Father DeSmet had come to feel that even his friends were unwittingly his enemies, that in their ignorance they were generously helping him with the right hand and destroying him with the left. He was in no mood to temporize now. He turned to the mayor. "We men of St. Louis," he said, "are money-mad. The cholera may be our tragic punishment."

"We are helpless!"

The priest heard Bryan Mullanphy's voice, but he kept his eyes fastened upon the mayor. "In New York there are quarantine laws. Ships that carry the pestilence cannot unload passengers or cargo."

Monsieur Gratiot made a second attempt to shift the conversation. "Father DeSmet, I hear that you have some new Jesuits at the house."

"Refugees from Europe, Monsieur, but we have no facilities for keeping them."

Mayor Barry played with his wine-glass. "Do you know what a quarantine would mean? Emigrants imprisoned in pestilence-stricken boats—shut up to die like rats in a hole."



"And the city cut off from its main source of supplies," Mullanphy added.

"No, it isn't that," DeSmet said. "It's the trade that would be lost. That is the sacrifice which no one can make."

"Cholera comes with wet weather," Gratiot said cheerfully. "Now that we have sunshine again, it will disappear soon enough."

"It will be with us as long as we unload our boats without investigation, and as long as we are content to leave our slops in the streets as a breeding place for flies."

"Perhaps you do not realize, Father, that we cannot get laborers enough to keep the levee clear . . ."

"Mayor Barry, forgive me, but I have been on the levee every day this week. There are enough hawkers down there to clean up the city in one day."

"We can hardly conscript . . ."

A woman's scream interrupted them, followed by a shouting in the street and the sound of people running. The men had scarcely risen from their chairs when the ladies, pink-cheeked with excitement, came in from the garden.

"Are you deaf?" Mrs. Barry cried. "Didn't you hear the fire-bell?"

Gratiot went to the window and drew back the curtain. The whole sky in the direction of the river was rose-colored. "My God, what a fire!" he exclaimed.

Immediately carriages were ordered. The butler ran for hats and gloves, stumbling over the rug as he went. Bells began ringing again. From all directions they sounded, an ominous, persistent frenzy of bells deadening the other noises.

Taking hasty leave of the women, the men hurried outside and crowded into two carriages. Although a lackey preceded them, lantern in hand, trying to force an opening through the throng, they could not drive into the street. People, shoving, shouting, pushing one another, and running toward the levee, paid no heed to the carriages which waited to turn from the driveway into the avenue.

"Look out! It's coming!" someone yelled.

"Get out of the way! The engine!"

The mob scarcely paused to make way for the runners, who were already so breathless they could no longer hold their signal lanterns high enough. Behind them fire engine, hose-cart, and hook-and-ladder truck were dragged through the street.

Monsieur Gratiot sent his carriages back to the stable, and the guests, attempting to make their way on foot, were soon separated in the confusion of people. Once DeSmet saw a brown beaver hat that might have belonged to Bryan Mullanphy, but the intervening heads were as thick as stalks of corn. He let the crowd push him toward the center of town.

Now the entire sky, even to the zenith, was red, as if a sword had cut across the darkness and drawn blood. It dyed the excited faces of the people with an unearthly ruddiness so that Father DeSmet in his haste and bewilderment was aware only of a moving mass of frightful pink disks with dark eye-sockets and black holes of open mouths. He could see that a considerable portion of the levee was on fire, the smoke rolling inland and spikes of flame reaching to the long lines of warehouses and factories. A strong east wind blew hot smoke into his face, stinging his eyes and parching his lips. The ashes that fluttered over his shoulders were like snow.

Long bucket chains had already been formed, one of them making a wide circuit from the foot of Olive westward to avoid the heat. A half-grown boy carrying a wash-tub without handles bumped into the priest and spilled water over his cassock. Father DeSmet scarcely noticed him. He was pushing his way frantically toward the cathedral.

He found the archbishop's house lighted and the door open, but the cathedral was dark. Inside, the votive candles formed a cluster of jewels at the feet of the Blessed Virgin and cast a soft glow upon the tall wax candles on either side of her. The priest genuflected before the altar and lighted a candle. Then he went into the sacristy. A light was already burning there. The archbishop, wearing a robe over his nightdress, stood in the center of the room. He held a pile of vestments in his arms.

"Father Pierre," he cried, "what can we save?"

"Where are you taking the vestments?" the priest demanded.

"Nowhere is safe. The whole city is going."

"Take them to the convent, your Grace. The fire will not spread that far west. What shall I bring?"

"I have the ciborium and altar vessels. Let the contents of the safe go. They're too heavy."

DeSmet opened the safe and held the candle close. It was filled with gold and silver vessels. The archbishop waited in the doorway, the lamp which he held making a white halo around his face. The missionary turned to him. "Take the vestments out before it's too late. I'll bring these."

"Don't be too long, Father Pierre. May God bless you for coming." As he disappeared through the doorway, the missionary noticed that the lamp in his hand trembled.

Father DeSmet began to empty the safe. Candlesticks, cruets, thuribles, a chalice veil, a small silver pyx, and all manner of vessels soon lay in a heap on one of the tables. He would have to go to the house for something to carry them in. Even the sacristy smelled of burning. He must hurry. Holding the candle in front of him, he started down the nave. Against the red light of the open doorway he saw two figures mounting the cathedral steps. They were carrying a man who kept turning his head from side to side, groaning with pain, and sometimes uttering agonized screams.

"Can't you get to a hospital?" the priest asked.

"It's impossible. He's dying. He wants to die in the church."

Father DeSmet held his candle over the disfigured face of the man. He was horribly burned. Only shreds of clothing clung to the charred arms and chest. The hair had been completely scorched from his head. He was, however, conscious and recognized the priest.

"Father, hear my confession!"

"Lay him at the feet of the Holy Virgin," Father DeSmet said to the men.

The confession took a long time, for pain halted the words of it. Meanwhile, the red glare through the doorway grew

increasingly ominous. Since the holy oils were still in the sacristy, the priest could give the injured man extreme unction.

When the sacrament was over Father DeSmet went to the archbishop's house. He tore the sheets from one of the beds and, having carried them back to the sacristy, began piling the contents of the safe into them. Then he went to the sanctuary for the monstrance. The smell of fire had grown more pungent. His load was so heavy he could hardly pull it onto his back. He was bent almost double under its weight. But he clutched the monstrance across his breast, wrapping the corners of the sheets around the lower end of it. Then, extinguishing the candle, he felt his way past the dead man, down the dark nave and into the street. At first it seemed that he could not move one foot before the other for the weight he bore, but after a little he became more accustomed to his load. The wind at his back enabled him to walk faster, although he had to fight against crowds of people running in all directions.

Factories and houses were now ablaze. The stream of water which poured from the hydrants was scanty and did not reach to the roofs of the buildings. Firemen climbing to the housetops could not keep their footing on account of the gale. Again and again they were driven back.

Suddenly the crowd stopped, broke asunder, and scattered like a herd of wild cattle. Up the street a woman in a night-gown came running, shrieking. The long hair streaming down her back was in flames. Father DeSmet tried to run after her, but his load was too heavy and he dared not put the monstrance down. Then he saw a man rush from the crowd, tear off his coat, and fling it over the woman's head. He forced her into the gutter, pulling the coat tighter all the time and beating her frantically, almost brutally, with his hands. Like a beast covering its prey, he rolled over her on the cobblestones, while the crowd stared, helpless, terrified. Father DeSmet, bent under his great white bundle and holding the glittering monstrance across his breast, stood beside the others. At last the man got up, staggering as if drunk, leaving the woman muddled and unconscious in the street. Her face was blackened and the singed ends of



her hair stuck out stiffly like a pickaninny's. The man, panting, holding his scorched palms away from his body, looked down upon her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was hard on her. But she's all right. It was the only way."

A Negro came up with a bottle of whisky and held it to the man's mouth. Someone picked the woman up and carried her away. A moment later the surging crowd passed on.

West of the cathedral frantic shopkeepers were emptying their stores of merchandise; and bolts of calico, bags of sugar, and baskets of imported wine were piled up on the sidewalks. Father DeSmet's eyes stung with the smoke. His throat ached. The weight of the vessels seemed unendurable. Ragged men and boys were breaking windows and plundering shops of their wares. No one noticed the priest. No one offered to help him. He continued to push his way against the frantic mob, up Walnut Street to Fourth and south to the Sacred Heart Convent.

The nuns were praying in the chapel, but Sister Fontaine waited at the door. She begged Father DeSmet to stay. The archbishop, she said, had already retired in a state of exhaustion. But the missionary lingered only long enough to drink the coffee that she poured for him.

"May the Lord keep you," she murmured, and she watched him from the door until he was lost in the crowd.

How they got the fire under control Father DeSmet never knew. Perhaps the east wind abated. Perhaps farther west, where the streets were wider and the buildings less congested, it did not spread so rapidly. Perhaps it was God's mercy.

The priest stayed near the cathedral all night, sometimes wandering among the crowd, but more often sitting on the stone steps where he could easily be found in case of need. Shortly before dawn an old woman joined him. He could see only the small, humped outline of her body, for the light of the fire had nearly disappeared. However, he judged by the edge of her voice and her language that she was one of those crea-

tures who could often be seen foraging for food like gutter rats along dark alleys not far from the levee.

"Serves 'em right," the old woman cackled.

"What serves whom right?" Father DeSmet inquired, not knowing whether she addressed the remark to him or to herself.

"The rich guys that own them buildings. I was down there when it started."

"How did the fire start?" The priest had already asked this question half a dozen times, but no one had known.

"The *White Cloud* caught fire. The crew tried to take her into the river away from other ships. But the wind blew like hell and shoved her back on them. They had it comin', the men that own them ships. May they all die of plague." She spat into the street.

"The fire engines must have been slow."

"God, no! It was that quick. There was twenty-two ships ablaze before you could have pulled an engine three blocks."

When the morning sun rose over the blackened hulls of the steamboats, five hundred buildings had been burned to the ground and sixteen city blocks destroyed. Behind the closed cathedral doors, however, the votive candles still cast a red glow at the Blessed Virgin's feet and upon the body of the man who slept beneath them.

West of the levee murky waves of smoke rose from piles of bricks and the charred skeletons of old French houses along the water-front. People still pushed and fought, milling through the streets, gathering up bolts of linen, boxes of oranges, and articles of various sorts. Men and boys dug among the hot bricks. Father DeSmet made his way toward Washington Avenue, so tired his body was numb. A number of hogsheads of raw sugar lay on one corner, half-emptied, their contents strewn across the sidewalk. A group of hungry children scooped the sugar up in their palms, and their tattered shirts were sticky with it. The priest dripped with perspiration. He reached for his handkerchief, wiped his face, and was surprised to find the linen streaked with black.

In front of Gray's store he saw a woman lying in the gut-

ter, writhing and moaning with pain. A child stood at her side, sobbing—a thin, pale-haired little girl, poorly dressed and disfigured by a birthmark under one eye. The crowd milled past, either heedless or unaware, their feet scarcely missing the woman's body.

Father DeSmet knelt in the street and drew her into his arms.

"Leave me alone!" she screamed, her face contorted with agony. "Do you want to die too?" It was apparent by her broken English that she was an emigrant.

Her cheeks were sunken and discolored, a cold, clammy sweat covering them and fringing her upper lip with beads of water. Her eyes, which had fallen deep into their sockets, stared at the priest's face, brilliant but motionless. Suddenly she was convulsed with a spasm of pain. She screeched violently and clawed at her clothes with wasted, wrinkled fingers.

A drunk came down the street, swinging an empty whisky bottle in one hand. He leered at the priest happily. "Keep your paws off that slut."

Father DeSmet ignored him. The woman was now tugging at her hair, which was clotted with mud and debris, as if she wanted to tear it out by the roots, at the same time whimpering and twisting her pain-racked body. All at once with almost superhuman strength she pushed him away, rolled over, and vomited into the gutter.

The drunk, who had not once ceased to fling insults and curses at the missionary, had by this time caught hold of his collar. "My God, get your dirty hands off her." He shoved his whole weight against Father DeSmet's back and would have succeeded in pushing him over if at that moment someone had not struck him under the jaw with a blow that sent him sprawling across the street.

When the violence of the attack had subsided, Father DeSmet lifted the woman in his arms and carried her through the crowd to Gray's shop. The sign which so recently had advertised "California bedsteads" now lay on the walk, broken and

trampled upon. The shop door was locked. He put the woman on the stoop and forced the whole weight of his heavy body against the door. Once, twice, three times—then the hinges gave. When he turned around, the child sat on the stoop, staring with wild, terrified eyes. The woman was dead.

Inside the store Father DeSmet opened one of the bedsteads just as he had seen the merchant do. In a corner of the room he found some boards, which he laid across the empty frame. He put the woman's body on them, crossed the hands upon her breast, blessed her, and made the sign of the cross. Her face was already turning black, the tell-tale sign of cholera.

The child had not moved. She sat on the stoop as if paralyzed. The priest came and sat down beside her. They remained there awhile motionless, the feet of the restless crowd moving before them. Then he drew her into his lap. The feel of his arms about her, the touch of his hands on her yellow hair seemed to relax her stiffness. "She must be eight or nine years old," Father DeSmet thought, "old enough to know about death."

After a little he spoke to her gently. "God has taken your mother away."

She burst into sobs and buried her face against his breast. He said nothing more, but silently stroked her hair and pressed her body against his. For a long time she wept, until worn out with her misery.

"Where is your father?" the priest asked.

She did not understand. She was not Flemish, he was sure of that. He repeated the question in German.

"He died on the boat," she answered.

"Did anyone else come with you? Brothers or sisters, an aunt or uncle?"

"Just mother and father," the child replied, and began sobbing again.

"You must get up," Father DeSmet said. "We have a long way to walk."

She obeyed him mutely, as if she did not care where they went. He took her hand and together they started up the



crowded street, this time not toward Washington Avenue and the university, but southward to the orphanage of the Sisters of Charity.

## 3

During the following weeks steamboats coming to St. Louis docked far down the levee, for the water, as it receded, had shifted the blackened hulls of burned boats in such a way that much of the wharf was obstructed. Dying emigrants were carried out of dank, unsanitary holds and rushed to overcrowded hospitals. As the cholera plague spread, the dead were left in the streets to await the arrival of drays. A windless, suffocating heat pushed down upon the half-ruined city, so that the offensive smell of the pestilence seemed to cling even to the hot air out of doors.

"One scruple of calomel and two grains of opium for the first stage; warmth and friction for the second; and for the third, cupping of the temples and stomach." This was all that Father DeSmet needed to know when he left the university at dawn for his desolate labor. He no longer looked to left or right as he hurried down the abandoned streets. The flies sickened him, swarming as they did about the blackened bodies that lay in the gutters; and few carts rumbled over the cobblestones except to dump their grim loads like lumber at the graveyard gates.

For two days the body of Madame Bolet's youngest child lay at home unburied, and when the widow ran into the streets shouting at the draymen, she found their wagons already full.

"Bury her in the garden," one of the drivers suggested.

Father DeSmet, coming an hour later, was disturbed to find her spading under the kitchen window.

"May God give you peace, Madame Bolet. Don't dig a grave there."

He led her into the house, down the dark corridor, and into the drawing-room, because there the stench was less offensive. While she sat facing an open window where red geraniums on the sill had withered from neglect, he went into the closed room. The smell was almost unendurable, even after the body had been

wrapped in blankets. As Father DeSmet carried it out he saw the woman sobbing, her head on the window-sill among the dilapidated, wine-colored petals.

The sight of a priest bearing a corpse through the city caused no surprise. Such incidents occurred daily. Besides, few people were abroad. True, he met André Jacquet, who had barbered the Jesuits faithfully for many years, but the sharp-faced little Frenchman offered no help. He merely stepped aside warily, tipped his hat, and said, "Père DeSmet, have you no fear?"

"No, André," the priest answered. "Do you think terror can save us?"

Father DeSmet knew well that fear of the pestilence was a thing to be dreaded. Only two days before, in front of the city hall, he had seen a man collapse and suffer such chills that the blood beneath his nails turned blue. But after he was taken to the hospital his color had returned and the spasm passed. Then he confessed that whenever he thought of the cholera, he was seized with a terror that paralyzed his legs so that they would not support him.

Because the Jesuit lay brothers worked all day and by lantern-light after dark, in the Catholic cemetery single graves were still being dug. But elsewhere, since hired laborers were scarce, long, wide trenches were spaded up and several hundred corpses packed in side by side, with children pressed between to fill up the vacant spaces. The priest was glad that Madame Bolet's child would have a grave of her own. He expected to wait and mark it himself. However, when he reached the graveyard he saw that the brothers were far behind in their work.

"We have sixty-seven corpses," Brother Henrik said, "and coffins for only ten."

Father DeSmet laid the child under a persimmon tree. "Bury her here—under this tree. It is Madame Bolet's child."

By the end of June the streets had been cleaned. Everywhere bonfires of coal, sulphur, and tar were kept burning in an attempt to purify the air. Smoke spread in a black pall over the roofs of stricken houses, and at night the fires flickered like giant candles lighted for the dead.

The men who had been getting rich from the gold-rush were now idle; farmers were afraid to send their produce into the city. Emigrants, eager to move westward away from the scourge, could buy no mules for their wagons; housewives who formerly had received paying guests dared not open their doors lest the pestilence come in. It seemed to Father DeSmet that St. Louis itself resembled a living organism which lately had been throbbing with life, and that now all at once the blood in its arteries had ceased to flow, the beat of its heart had stopped, putrefaction had set in.

Cholera had not yet touched the university. Every morning the students assembled in the college church to pray. They had promised the Blessed Virgin a silver crown if she spared them, and, as if by miracle, they were all still free of the disease. In the Sacred Heart Convent, however, the nuns were dying. They had worn themselves out helping the sick. Father DeSmet marveled at their endurance. Those women, whose faces appeared so frail under their black hoods, seemed to have inexhaustible strength. They had even gone into the brothels and grog-houses, and when it was too late to administer to the sick, they bathed the bodies.

"I do not mind it," Sister Fontaine had told DeSmet. "Each time I say to myself, 'It is as if I were bathing Our Lord himself.'" And now Sister Fontaine too had fallen ill. Father DeSmet had little time to pray either in his room or in church, but all day at his work he kept whispering prayers for the nun.

One night, pale and weary, the Jesuits went into the refectory. The clear, strong voice of the reader came from the lectern like a sword striking the air between the priests as they ate in silence:

With desolation shall the earth be laid waste, and it shall be utterly spoiled, for the Lord hath spoken the word. The earth mourned, and faded away, and is weakened. And the earth is infected by the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws.

Father DeSmet tried to listen, but his mind kept slipping back to the things of this world—to Madame Bolet weeping by the geraniums, to the men digging graves, to Sister Fontaine's blue-streaked face convulsed with pain—

The mirth of timbrels hath ceased, the noise of them that rejoice is ended, the melody of the harp is silent. They shall not drink wine with a song; the drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The city of vanity is broken down, every house is shut up, no man cometh in . . .

"Poor Skellman," Father DeSmet was thinking, "sitting alone in his shop with no one to buy Jellerson's *Great Map*. He had talked with Skellman that morning. His wife had died and been buried without a coffin. The merchant explained that he had sent his slave to the carpenter's for a box, but on the way back someone had robbed the Negro—a man who declared that he could get his three children into it, which was better than letting it serve for one corpse only.

At the other end of the table Father Elet was coughing. He held his napkin over his face, but Father DeSmet could see that his forehead was badly flushed even to the roots of his hair. "If cholera comes to the university, Father Elet will go first," he thought.

After dinner, having put some opium pills in his pocket, he started to the Sacred Heart Convent. The streets were empty, although the houses appeared to be overlighted as if the people within no longer took trouble to conserve their oil. The priest walked down the middle of the street, sometimes in darkness and sometimes in the light of the bonfires. Evening had not dispelled the afternoon heat, but a slight breeze fanned the tree boughs, bringing to his nostrils now and then, in spite of the fragrant tar, the stench of the dead.

A short distance from the convent, Father DeSmet saw someone running toward him, about a block down the street. He waited by one of the bonfires to let the flame reveal his clerical garb, for in St. Louis there were many who even in distress would not accost a priest. As the woman drew near he



saw that she was a Negress. She had a strong, angular body; and large cheek-bones protruded under her eyes.

"Father, my man is sick," she gasped breathlessly, standing by the fire so that its glow fell across her face.

Father DeSmet looked into her eyes. Tragic eyes they were, like pits of black despair. "God bless you! I will go with you."

"No, suh, you don' go with me," she answered excitedly. "I go back to Marse Babson. You's got to go to Crawford's Slave Pen. Ask for Cuff."

"To Crawford's Slave Pen?"

"My man—Father—they sole him. They's shippin' him South."

Father DeSmet caught the woman's hand. "May our Holy Mother comfort you. Come here at this time tomorrow night, and I'll bring you news of him."

The woman stifled a cry, and kneeling down she kissed the hem of the priest's robe. Then she hurried away in the direction from which she had come.

Father DeSmet turned south. He would not go to the convent. Sister Fontaine, he knew, was being cared for, but this unfortunate slave was in danger of dying unabsolved. Because death by cholera comes in strange ways and without warning, and no one can tell whether a man be granted two days or two hours, he walked rapidly.

The brick building which served as Crawford's Slave Pen stood flush with the street. Behind it was a yard enclosed on three sides by a whitewashed paling some fifteen feet high, and on the fourth walled in by the building itself. Here the slaves might walk about or sit in the sunshine awaiting auction or shipment into the buying states. Although the blinds were drawn, the priest could see that a lamp burned inside the building. He knocked on the door. No one answered it. The stillness of the deserted street was oppressive. He pounded hard a second time, the whole door shaking under the impact of his fist. At last a tall, languid Mulatto came, carrying a lamp.

"I am Pierre Jean DeSmet, a priest. Is Crawford in?"

"No, suh, he ain't," the man answered and started to close the door. Father DeSmet pushed it back.

"Just a minute," he said. "You have a man here named Cuff."

"That Nigger's been sold."

"I want to see him."

"He ain't for sale."

"He's sick. I have medicine."

"I ain't to let nobody in," the Mulatto said stubbornly.

"You belong to Crawford, don't you?"

"He said I ain't to let nobody in."

With each remark Father DeSmet had moved a little farther into the doorway until now he stood inside the hall. "You're a slave too, but Crawford looks out for you. If you got sick, he'd let a friend see you. If you're a Christian, you'll let me see Cuff."

"I'd get beat for it."

"Crawford won't come until morning. I'll be gone in an hour."

"Come in then, but don't tell nobody." The Mulatto closed and bolted the door. "They're all dying," he said in despair, "and Crawford ain't come down for two days."

"Has he sent a doctor?"

"No."

"Let me see the men."

"I got the sick ones in the yard. They don't stink so bad out there."

Father DeSmet followed him through the house and to the back door. It was so dark in the yard he could see nothing. The groans of the stricken slaves, however, sounded like the lowing of cattle, and at the sight of the lamp there was a scuffling of bodies in the grass.

"My God, water! Gimme water!" someone moaned.

"Have you another lantern?" Father DeSmet asked the attendant.

The Mulatto reached for a lantern which hung from a nail by the door and lighted it, handing it to the priest.

"Get some water for these men right away."

"We ain't got much left."

"I'll see that you have plenty in the morning. Bring a pail of water right now and a dipper."

When the attendant had gone, Father DeSmet held the lantern high and peered through the dark. The slaves were lying along the paling, six of them. They were half-naked. Either they had clawed at their clothing during the agonizing convulsions which cholera always brings, or the heat of the yard had been unbearable. There was one woman. Fully clothed, she lay apart from the others, turning her head restlessly and gasping for breath.

The priest went over and held the lantern above them. "Is Cuff here?" he asked.

One of the men pulled himself up with difficulty. "I'se Cuff. Is you a priest? Thank you, Jesus!"

At that moment the woman uttered a horrible shriek.

"You're all right, Cuff," Father DeSmet said. "I'll take care of this woman first."

The woman, however, had fallen into a coma, and there was nothing that could be done for her.

"My God, water!" one of the slaves cried again.

"You will have water in a moment," the priest said quietly.

He knelt beside Cuff, put his arm under the slave's head, and lifted him up carefully. "Your wife sent me. How long have you been sick?"

"Two days. Don' give me no stuff. I want to die. Jest let me go to confession."

The Mulatto had reappeared with a pail of water and was passing the dipper among the slaves.

"Take some medicine. The pain won't be so bad then."

Cuff tried to push the priest away. "No, suh. They's sendin' me South, Father. Let me die."

Father DeSmet forced the medicine into the sick man's mouth and then let him lie in the grass for a little while.

"Are your legs numb?" he asked.

"I cain't feel 'em at all."

"I'm going to rub them. It will feel good, and while I do, you whisper your confession."

While the slave mumbled, the priest rubbed his limbs. They were cold and covered with an ill-smelling sweat, but they seemed to gain warmth with the friction.

After he had given Cuff absolution he moved on to the next man. Fortunately there was enough opium for them all. More than he needed, because one Negro was dead. He lay face downward with his legs drawn up under his body, and the slaves apparently had not noticed. Father DeSmet studied the ever-changing designs which the insects made as they flew about the lantern in the grass. The misery of the Negroes was already appalling, and the presence of a corpse among them would only add to the horror. He turned the dead man onto his back and straightened the legs.

"You're getting along all right," he said aloud, bending over the shrunken face. "Here, take some of this. It will put you right to sleep. There, that's fine."

As the priest delivered this monologue, he noticed that all the hair on one side of the dead slave's head was gray and that on the other side it was jet black. Without being told, he knew what had happened. It was customary to color the hair of gray-headed Negroes before putting them on the block. They brought better prices that way. Apparently the poor fellow had been seized with an acute attack while the dye-brush was being used.

The Mulatto stood in the doorway waiting for DeSmet. When they were inside the house again, the priest said, "You've got a dead man down there."

"Yeah, I saw. He wouldn't take no water."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I'll fetch him out in the morning. It's too dark now."

"Get him out now," Father DeSmet said, "and don't let one of those slaves know he's dead."

The Mulatto sulked. "I belong to Crawford. He gives me my orders."

Father DeSmet pressed his lips together and stared into the



attendant's face with eyes which the lamplight turned to polished steel. "How would you like to sleep all night with a corpse—and on a night as hot as this? Get him out now and I'll help you. Tomorrow morning you'll do it alone."

"I'll hold the lantern," the Mulatto offered.

"Very well, hold the lantern. But remember, don't say one word. I'll do the talking."

The two men went out together. Father DeSmet knelt beside the dead man.

"Crawford tells me you've had rheumatism. It's bad for you lying in the grass like this. I'm going to take you inside."

The corpse was heavy. He was a big fellow. The priest took care, however, to lift him just as he would a living man. The Mulatto walked ahead, holding the lantern.

When they had closed the door behind them, Father DeSmet shifted the body so that it hung head downward over his shoulder. "Have you got slaves inside here?" he asked.

"Yes, they're sound enough. They're sleeping."

"I'll put this man on the sidewalk outside. If he lies here until morning he'll make the house smell. A cart should come by sometime tomorrow. Thanks for your help. Crawford will never know."

The Mulatto followed him to the front door. "We ain't got no water left."

"I'll have some water here in the morning," Father DeSmet said. "Good night."

4

Toward the end of summer emigrant boats ceased to arrive. The worst of the cholera plague had passed. With the cold, drizzly autumn weather normal life was resumed. Once again, when the sycamore trees turned yellow, carriages clattered over the cobblestones and the ladies of St. Louis shook the smell of camphor from their winter furs. There was, however, little gaiety in the city. The year which had begun in exuberance was ending in contrition. Men spoke of emigration, of the gold-rush, and of rebuilding the levee with a new soberness in their voices. When the archbishop pronounced the words, "*Ite, missa*

*est*," worshipers no longer drew on their gloves and made ready to leave the cathedral. Long after the servers had snuffed the last candle, they remained to whisper prayers for the dead.

When winter came Father DeSmet was once more preoccupied with the problems of the vice-province. He spent long hours at his desk, writing letters and making entries in the account books. In the evenings he took walks through the woods near Chouteau's Pond. The enthusiasm he had felt five years before would never return. The doors which he had opened were shutting one by one. At last he had learned that a man's growth is measured by his increasing humility, by the realization that he has no power save through the will of God, that the helve lies lifeless awaiting the carpenter's hand. When the Father General wrote him from Rome, "More than one person assures me that your relations published with so much *éclat* are products of the imagination and poetry," he accepted the reprimand as one long accustomed to pain accepts a recurrent attack.

Nevertheless, all that winter and the following spring Father DeSmet still thought that one day he would return to the Flatheads. His penance had been a long one, but in the end he would go back to the mountains and die there as a wounded animal returns to its burrow. He would lie down among the blue lupins, and the Indians would sit all night at his wake.

Night after night the stars shed no warmth upon the naked boughs, and the *Aves* which the priest repeated fell earthward with a hollow sound. It was not that his faith had thinned. Of that he was sure. If anything, it had grown deeper and more certain. In the earlier days, like Job, he had striven to draw out Leviathan with a fish-hook, to press down his tongue with a cord, and to put a rope through his nose; and now, like Job, he repented in dust and ashes.

For many months no word had been received from Father Mengarini. Occasionally fur traders stopping in St. Louis brought news, always discomfoting news. Some white squatters had built cabins in the Bitter Root Valley and were cutting down the trees. A Flathead warrior by the name of Little Faro was stirring up dissension in the tribe. Walking Bear had died.

The Indians no longer lived at the mission. They had gone on their buffalo hunt leaving the missionaries unprotected, and when they returned seemed disappointed that the Blackfeet had not massacred the priests. And at last came the bitter, unbelievable news that the Flathead mission had been abandoned and that Father Mengarini, broken-hearted and disillusioned, had fled.

Father DeSmet said nothing to the traders who brought him this news. He said little to Father Elet. He merely took longer walks under the trees near Chouteau's Pond.

## VII

### The Lion and the Lamb Lie Down Together

1851

I

Another year passed. Emigrant tents sprawled over the flat lands beyond St. Louis. Germans fleeing from the Revolution of 1848, and exiles from Ireland, poverty-stricken and haggard, crowded from the steamboats that every day unloaded their living cargo along the levee. Cholera continued spasmodically, usually first attacking the emigrant boats from New Orleans. The plague was accepted with gravity, but without panic. St. Louis had become accustomed to it.

Meanwhile, as dust thickened along the Oregon Trail and the frightened buffalo gradually withdrew into more remote regions, rumors spread that the Indian tribes east of the Rocky Mountains were becoming restless. Day after day the wagons moved westward in one never-ending line, flanked on either side by herds of grazing cattle which cropped away the prairie grass, leaving the ground bare and dusty. No one could guess the possible fighting strength of the discontented tribes, and they cast a menacing shadow over the emigrant trail. It was Colonel D. D. Mitchell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, who first proposed a general peace council with the Indians at Fort Laramie. He knew Father DeSmet well and counted upon his help.

The priest had received his guests in one of the small, plainly furnished parlors of St. Louis University. The windows were flung open, and a fresh April breeze dallied with the crisp, white curtains. Sunshine haloed the image of the Blessed Virgin, which stood on a pedestal in one corner, heightening the color of her blue robe and the pink of her painted cheeks.



"This is once," Mitchell said confidently to the missionary, "when the government is on your side."

"Thanks to Tom Fitzpatrick," Benjamin Gratz Brown put in.

Father DeSmet turned to the newspaper reporter, who sat on the window-sill with the self-assurance characteristic of Harvard graduates. "What does Fitzpatrick have to do with this?" he asked.

Brown pushed the floppy red hair back from his youthful face. "He's been fighting two years to get this bill through. If the negotiations are successful, it will mean lasting peace between the plains Indians and the whites."

"I wish I could believe you," the priest said skeptically. "You know yourself, Mitchell, that the government's promises to the Potawatomis were not worth the paper they were written on."

The third man, Robert Campbell, sat stiffly in a straight-backed chair. Fifteen years before he had come out of the wilderness wearing hide-leggings and swinging an Indian scalp. Now he was a close-mouthed, prosperous retail merchant who drank no champagne and kept no slaves—two peculiarities which made him unpopular in St. Louis. "The Potawatomis were weak," he said dryly.

"And the plains Indians?" the priest asked.

"Why, they could wipe out every caravan on the Oregon Trail," Brown said. "And the way things are now they'd be justified. There's not a blade of grass growing in the Platte Valley any more. It's been cropped to the roots by the cattle. There's not a buffalo herd within a hundred miles. Without protection the Indians will starve to death in ten years."

Father DeSmet smiled. The idealistic enthusiasm of this young newspaperman charmed him. It recalled the buoyancy of his own youth. "It's pretty hard to find ten thousand Indians. How are you going to get them to attend this council?"

"Fitzpatrick's working on that now," Mitchell explained. "He's going up the Arkansas and north to the Platte, trying to get in touch with all the tribes under his agency. Next summer he'll send out runners from Fort Laramie. There's no trouble getting them to come if you promise presents."

"Yes. I've no doubt about that." Father DeSmet played with his crucifix thoughtfully. "The Cheyennes, the Sioux, and the Arapahoes can pitch their tents together and pass the pipe around. But when the Snakes ride over the hill your peace council may turn into a battlefield."

"That's exactly why we want you there," Mitchell said. "You're our talisman—the only person in this part of the country who can make the lion and the lamb lie down together."

"It's easier to get them to lie down than to keep them there." Father DeSmet had already made up his mind. He would go to the peace council, but he wanted these men to understand clearly that he would be no pawn on the government's chess-board. "I've spent a good many years winning the confidence of the Indians," he said, "and I did it just one way, by never making promises I could not keep. Now you want me to go to your council and make a promise on behalf of the United States Government; and if the government fails, the Catholic Church will pay the price."

"The United States can't fail this time," Campbell said.

"It's a purely business transaction," Mitchell added. "The natives will be assigned certain territories where they can live and hunt in freedom. They'll receive an annuity, and in return they'll have to guarantee the emigrants a right-of-way over the Oregon Trail to California and permit the establishment of military posts."

"And when the government wants more land north or south of the Platte, then what will happen to your treaty?"

"They'll never want any more land," Brown said. "The Oregon Trail is wide enough to transport the whole Atlantic coast to California."

"I'm not thinking of California, Mr. Brown. I'm thinking of settlements, of farms."

The three men laughed incredulously. "Why, what do you mean?" Campbell asked.

"I mean just this. The government has been removing the Indians for a long time, pushing them from one piece of land to another. When settlers begin to occupy the country west

of the Missouri—this country that you are giving the Indians forever—there won't be any place to push the natives except into the Pacific Ocean."

Brown folded his arms deprecatingly. "Father DeSmet, you're jesting. Do you really think that in a nation as vast and fertile as this anyone is going to choose to live on the desert?"

"The country you call a desert has supported millions of buffalo and a good many thousand men for a long, long time."

"At any rate, we won't have to face that problem for another hundred years," Campbell said. "By then the Indians will be civilized."

"In America all predictions fail," DeSmet remarked.

"Well, what's your decision? Will you go with us?" Mitchell felt that the discussion was becoming irrelevant.

"The final decision, of course, rests in Father Elet's hands. As vice-provincial, he is my superior. In any event, you understand, Mitchell, that I could never go as a representative of the government. I am by choice a servant of the Indians."

"That would not affect any compensation that we agree upon."

"Compensation?"

"We aren't asking you to do this gratis, you know."

"I am a Jesuit missionary," Father DeSmet said, "and not an employee of the United States. I can accept nothing beyond my expenses."

"You're free to make your own terms," Mitchell replied. "What we want is your help."

"I will discuss the matter with Father Elet and let you know his decision."

The men walked together down the hall and lingered on the steps of the building. The April sun warmed their faces. Two sparrows fluttered from a sycamore tree to the pavement.

Robert Campbell studied the unassuming, gray-headed priest with interest. Certainly there was nothing dynamic about the Jesuit's appearance. His long, unkempt hair framed a face which was kind rather than determined; his pale blue eyes lacked

vigor; and after five years in the city his massive body had softened to flabbiness.

"You are in a very enviable position," Campbell said suddenly. "The land west of the Missouri is not controlled by the Indians, the emigrants, or the United States, I think, but by a certain Jesuit priest in St. Louis."

"History is made up of such anomalies," Brown said, laughing. "It's a pity they seldom get into the textbooks."

After the men had gone Father DeSmet remained standing on the steps, watching the sparrows. They moved quickly, as if the spring were tonic in their blood. The birds, the newspaper reporter, and the group of university students passing through a door in the distance were all young. Indeed, at that moment it seemed to the priest that the whole world was filled with the exuberance of youth—everything and everyone save himself. It was not his gray hair nor his years that made the real difference. It was the hurt inside. For five years he had been in St. Louis, doing useless chores about the college, helping the men and women whom anyone could help; and now at last he had an opportunity to return to the Indians, now when the Flat-head mission was abandoned. He remembered Mina-Yougha gathering eggs, Ignace weeding the vegetable garden, and the little herd of milch cows that seemed to bow their heads when the angelus was rung. They were all gone now. There was nothing left but empty buildings and weeds and the silent mission bell. Well, he would not go to the Bitter Root Valley. He would go to Fort Laramie to the peace council and come back to St. Louis. That was God's will.

"You had better take someone with you," Father Elet said that afternoon.

"If I go by way of Fort Union, it will be a hard trip. There is no road along the Big Horn Mountains."

Father Elet was surprised. "Surely you will not go by way of Fort Union."

"I told Mitchell, Father Provincial, that if I accepted this commission, I would go not as a government representative, but



as a friend of the Indians. The men will follow the Oregon Trail. They will probably fall in with one of the emigrant trains. If I were to accompany them, the Indians would think I had allied myself with their enemies."

"Perhaps you are right," Elet agreed. "But if you take the longer route, there is even more reason why you should not make the trip alone. You're not as young as you used to be, Father Pierre."

"Old age comes early in St. Louis," DeSmet answered grimly.

The vice-provincial shook his head and sighed. "I know. It has left scars on all of us." Father Elet had been confined to his bed much of the time lately, and once he had been unable to finish Mass because of a hemorrhage. He looked out the window wistfully, and when he spoke again, he uttered the other man's thoughts. "Father Pierre, I think I shall not be here when you return from the West."

The missionary laid his hand on the vice-provincial's shoulder. "Father Provincial, I shall pray that God keep you, for the sake of us all."

"I wonder if Father Francis would not be a good man for the trip," Elet said.

"Father, I really need no companion. I have spent a good deal of my life in that country."

The note of stubbornness in those words was not characteristic of Father DeSmet. Father Elet looked at his friend sharply. "Is it because of the way they feel here that you want to go alone?"

The missionary nodded.

"Father Pierre, we Jesuits were not created perfect."

"I know. I do not mean to judge them," DeSmet answered.

"Could we all live as brothers, without jealousy or misunderstanding, we would indeed have the grace of God." The vice-provincial played with a letter-opener that lay on his desk. "Next week Father Christian Hoecken will be back from the Kaw River."

A light came into DeSmet's eyes. He and Father Christian

loved and understood one another, but they had not been together for years.

Elet hesitated. "I think he would make a good traveling companion."

The missionary studied his crucifix a moment, overcome by the kindness of his superior. Then without lifting his head, he said, "Father Provincial, you are too good. Without you, these years in St. Louis would have been very bitter ones."

"Will Father Christian do?" the vice-provincial asked.

"It would be a blessing to have him with me," DeSmet replied.

2

In the winter of 1851 the mountain snows had been heavy. By June the Missouri River had overflowed its banks, converting fields and forests into a vast, muddy lake. Father DeSmet and Father Christian Hoecken leaned over the rail of the *St. Ange*. Except for the noise and vibration of the engine the boat seemed to lie motionless. For more than an hour it had remained at approximately the same distance from a chicken coop which, swept downstream by the terrible unseen current of the flood, had caught in the upper branches of a submerged cottonwood. As far as the priests could see, the surface of the water was strewn with wrecks. Houses, barns, stables, fences, and trees floated by in confusion.

"We're not making any progress," Father Hoecken said.

"LaBarge is the best man on the Missouri. We'll get there sometime."

At that moment something struck the prow of the boat. She seemed to be pushed backwards downstream. Members of the crew rushed forward, but the two priests remained at the rail. Soon they saw a great quantity of lumber borne down the river. The face of the water was almost paved with it.

Captain LaBarge came out of the pilot-house. He was wiping the perspiration from his neck. The heat had been like steam all day, and the air was saturated with the river smell.

"That's Burton's lumber-yard," LaBarge said. "I wonder if the old man got out in time."

"How can you tell it's Burton's?" Father DeSmet asked.

"His house went down on the other side. That's what struck the boat just now." LaBarge had joined the priests and was staring at the water in fascination. "My God, what a mess!"

"How far are we?" Father Hoecken asked.

"About five miles below the mouth of the Platte. If we get there by night it will be a miracle."

"I don't see how you're going to refuel," Father DeSmet said.

"We can last a good while yet. The water won't be over the bluffs near Kanessville. I'm glad there aren't any women on board."

The *St. Ange* was loaded with supplies for the American Fur Company, and she carried eighty of their employees. They were Irish, German, Swiss, French, and Italian emigrants who had hired out to the company. The men of different nationalities did not mix with one another but formed little groups, talking excitedly in their native tongues. The sound of this babble might have been interesting had not the deafening noise of the engine drowned it out.

"The thing that troubles me," LaBarge said, "is this infernal dampness. It breeds malaria. Look! There goes the Swede's cow barn."

A newly painted red building floated down the river. Squatting on the roof was a white hen. She crouched on her perch, as stationary as a stuffed bird, and it was impossible to tell whether her apparent paralysis was due to fear or exhaustion.

"That dame's had a long ride," LaBarge said, laughing.

"Is there any way we can get her off?" Father Hoecken asked.

"I'm afraid not."

The barn had already passed by.

"Cholera, fires, floods—the land of golden opportunity!" Father Hoecken mused.

"Yes, there's always something." LaBarge began filling his pipe. "I'm damned sorry about the Swede. He put his last dime in that barn, built it this spring, and must have just finished paint-

ing it. It isn't only the barn, of course. It's everything—cattle drowned, crops washed out. I told him he was settling too near the river, but the poor fellow was afraid to go inland. He's afraid of everything—Indians, coyotes, robbers. Well, I don't blame him; I don't blame him at all."

The chicken coop and the submerged cottonwood had by now disappeared. The *St. Ange* was moving upstream. Slowly and with tremendous difficulty she wrestled with the current.

For nearly a week the days repeated themselves, until it seemed to Father DeSmet that the whole world was rapidly being washed southward into the Gulf of Mexico. Surely the settlers along the Missouri River and its tributaries had multiplied quickly during the last five years to have so many barns and sheds and fences. But still more numerous were the uprooted trees that the current often dragged upon one another, so that heaps of trunks, limbs, and roots tangled together came drifting toward the *St. Ange*. The heat increased and was so heavy with moisture that the men panted for breath. Since all the old landmarks were under water, the priests could learn the progress which the boat made only by repeatedly questioning Captain LaBarge and the pilot.

Before they reached the mouth of the Little Sioux, cholera broke out. Four passengers came down with it almost at once. Although Fathers Hoecken and DeSmet attended the sick men immediately, the disease spread. Within a few days the boat was a floating hospital.

Lewis Wilcox, a clerk of the American Fur Company, collapsed while walking into the saloon. Father Hoecken, who happened to see him, picked the sick man up and carried him to his cabin. By the time LaBarge and DeSmet had arrived, the priest was already rubbing his limbs with camphor. Wilcox was conscious but dazed by a torpor which rendered him insensible to the pain accompanying the convulsions. His eyes were sunken and his face discolored.

"I guess I'm done for," he said to the captain. "My mother—she's in New York."

"I will write to her," LaBarge said.



Wilcox was not a Catholic and wished no religious consolation. Father DeSmet silently wiped the cold sweat from his face. There was nothing one could say to the man. He lay motionless upon his berth, facing death with unconcern. His body seemed to shrink visibly, and his eyes hardened into a glassy stare.

"It's hard to talk—" he mumbled at last. "I got—" As he spoke, his gaze was fixed on the ceiling. "I got a boy—with the Minnetarees."

"We'll give him everything you have left," Father DeSmet answered, anticipating the man's request.

"Yes."

Less than two hours had elapsed since the attack, and Lewis Wilcox was dead.

It was necessary to get rid of the body as quickly as possible. There was, however, no convenient place to pull ashore, and all the sandbars were under flood. After dark, a weight was fastened to the corpse, and the men cast it overboard.

The next morning Father DeSmet could not leave his bed. He was seized with nausea and a dizziness which prevented his walking. The two priests occupied adjoining cabins, and DeSmet rapped on the wall to summon his friend.

"I'm no good," he said to Father Hoecken. "When I am needed the most this worn-out body takes its revenge."

Father Hoecken felt the priest's face. It was hot. His pulse was rapid. "By the grace of our blessed Saviour, it's not cholera," he said.

"Just a bilious attack, Father Christian. How many cholera cases are there today?"

"Thirteen."

"Too many for one man to take care of. I'll get up by noon."

"No indeed, Father Pierre. You must lie here until the fever goes."

"It will be gone by noon," DeSmet answered.

For three days, however, there was no change in his condition. The fever would subside in the morning and rise as the day wore on.

"Bilious attack!" Captain LaBarge scoffed. "He's got malaria."

"I don't care what it is," Father Hoecken replied, "so long as it isn't cholera."

LaBarge looked at the priest. "See here, Father Hoecken, you're killing yourself on this trip. You look like an old man today. What's the matter?"

"I'm all right."

"How much sleep did you get last night?"

"Enough for a Jesuit, Captain LaBarge."

All that morning as the priest cared for the sick, he felt an increasing numbness in his legs. "I must keep moving," he told himself, "or the circulation will stop." Twice he returned to his cabin, sat on the edge of his berth, and rubbed his legs vigorously. They had already begun to exude a cold sweat. It gave him a sick feeling inside. He prayed a little and returned to the cholera patients.

In the afternoon he went to Father DeSmet's cabin. "How is the fever, Father Pierre?"

When DeSmet rolled over, he was astounded by the appearance of his friend. "Father Christian, what has happened? You are ill!"

"No, I'm not ill. Tired perhaps."

"I know. You've been working all day and all night. And I—I lie here utterly useless. I tried to get up this morning, but my legs play tricks on me. You must take care of yourself."

Father Hoecken felt DeSmet's face. It was no longer hot. It was cold, icy cold. "Do you feel any numbness?" he asked.

"Anyone would be numb after three days in bed."

Hoecken put his hand on the other priest's wrist. "Father, are you getting the cholera?"

"I don't know."

"Have you had any pain?"

"Some."

The men looked at one another with the expression of whipped dogs. Then DeSmet laughed. "It isn't that bad. But I

think, Father Christian, you should hear my confession and give me extreme unction."

There was a knock on the door. Captain LaBarge came in. "Father Hoecken, the Italian, Giacomo, is dying."

"I'll come right away." After the captain had gone, Hoecken turned to DeSmet. "There's no immediate danger for you. I'll come back later."

Three men died that afternoon, and Father Hoecken, always fighting the numbness in his legs and the spasmodic pain in his belly, dragged himself from bed to bed. It was late when he returned to his cabin. Father DeSmet would be asleep. He got into his berth. All at once, as if he no longer had strength to fight against the disease, the blood surged upward from his feet, and as it rose his veins grew cold. He wanted to vomit. Violent pain cramped his legs and hands.

"Father Pierre!" he cried out, and pounded hard against the wall. "Father Pierre, Father Pierre!"

Holding to the wall for support, DeSmet, sick and dizzy, felt his way through the darkness into the adjoining cabin. "Father Christian, what is it?"

"I am dying. Hear my confession!"

DeSmet knelt by the bed. He touched Hoecken's brow. It was cold and wet. "No, Father Christian, no. It can't be! Where is the opium?"

"It's no use. God's will be done. This is my happiest hour."

As Father DeSmet heard his confession, he held the dying priest in his arms. His body was twisted with agony, and the recurring spasms halted his words. When he had finished, DeSmet lighted a lamp and brought the holy oils for the last sacraments. His hands trembled, and the words of the Latin ritual came softly, as if they had been washed in tears. Father Hoecken responded to the prayers with self-possession and serenity, but after the last words had been said, he lay motionless and rigid.

"Father Christian, can you hear me?" DeSmet asked.

There was no change of expression in the sunken eyes or the stiff, yellow face. His lips moved slowly. "Yes, I hear."

"Can you listen to my confession now?"

"God grant me strength for it."

Kneeling, burying his face in the bedclothes, Father DeSmet made his confession. The dying man lifted his arm with difficulty, for every movement caused him pain, and touched the long gray hair spread over the sheets. Almost inaudibly he whispered the absolution. Then the power of speech forsook him.

Father DeSmet remained in the same attitude as he recited the prayers of the agonizing. He was no longer cold. A scorching fever seemed to be consuming him. It was hard for his stiff, parched lips to form the sentences:

Grant, O Lord! that, while we here lament the departure of thy servant, we may ever remember that we are most certainly to follow him. Give us Grace to prepare for that last hour, by a good life, that we may not be surprised by a sudden death; but be ever watching when Thou shalt call, so that, with the Spouse, we may enter into eternal glory: Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The lamp burned on the table nearby, sending a yellow glow over the whitewashed wall. The silence in the room had no beginning and no end. Time had withdrawn. Eternity, hushed and unseen, had entered where the priest still knelt, sobbing now, with his head buried in the sheets. Suddenly he heard the death-rattle and looked up. Father Hoecken was dead, his crucifix clutched in one hand and his rosary in the other. Gently Father DeSmet took the rosary away, folded the withered hands across the dead man's breast, and laid the crucifix between them.

### 3

Nearly a month later when the pestilence had entirely disappeared and Father DeSmet was well again, the *St. Ange* arrived at Fort Union. The flag was raised, the cannon fired, and drinks were served under the morning-glories of Alexander Culbertson's piazza. The trader, who had not seen the priest for a number of years, was disconcerted by the change in his appearance. There was more of the monk about him and less of the promoter. The deepened lines in his face made Culbertson think of dry



gulches that are worn into canyons almost overnight by the spring rains. Then too, a certain puffiness under his eyes gave him a melancholy expression. Father DeSmet would soon be an old man.

Culbertson himself had aged, but he was still the quick-moving business manager. He puffed his pipe and regarded his guest quizzically. "The city ain't done you no good," he said bluntly.

Father DeSmet set his empty glass on the floor. "When I taste raw whisky again I know I'm in the West. I'm all right, Culbertson. One can't tether the years like a young colt."

"Yeah. It ain't years I'm thinkin' of, Father DeSmet."

In front of the house a sloping lawn of starved grass reached to the pickets. In the center stood the flagpole surrounded by an octagonal railing within which overgrown, worm-eaten lettuce and water cress made a tangled mass of brown and green. "It would be bitter now—that lettuce," Father DeSmet thought. "It has lived too long."

Culbertson's squaw, a Piegan woman with a heavy mane of black hair and a body as muscular as a man's, came out smoking her pipe, and sat on the stoop.

"Be you goin' up to the Flatheads?" Culbertson asked the priest.

DeSmet shook his head. "Not this time."

"They ain't goin' to last much longer, the Indians. It's like runnin' down a herd of buffalo."

"You can't tell what's going to happen," the Jesuit said thoughtfully. "The cities in the States are seething. The abolitionists get stronger every day. Anti-Catholic feeling grows with increasing emigration from Europe. There's talk of a railroad from St. Louis to the coast, you know."

"A railroad!" Culbertson exclaimed. "That's a pretty dream. They'd have to shovel them mountain peaks into the canyons."

"I don't know, Culbertson, but in this country dreams come true—even the bad ones."

The smoke from the squaw's pipe lay in a transparent ribbon on the air. The woman was not listening to them. Her skirt carelessly sagging between her knees, she sat mute and expressionless

like some everlasting rock, as if the comedies and tragedies of the human race were less than a fly speck on the floor.

"How would you like to have a railroad to Fort Union?" the priest asked the trader.

"I ain't worryin' much. You got to take things as they come."

"That's right. When the floods wash your fields into the river, you trap beavers. When the skies change, you look for new stars."

The trader did not understand these words. "About thirty Indians are goin' to the council with us," he said abruptly. "Assiniboin, Crows, Minnetarees. Mitchell, I guess, took the Trail."

"We should have done the same. We might have escaped cholera."

"Hell, no! They're dyin' like flies after frost down there."

A half-breed came around the building so quietly in his moccasins that he was on the piazza before the men knew. "Boot, he kill wolf! You want to see?"

"Good for him!" Culbertson laughed, getting up. "He's been plaguin' our cattle for a long time, Father. Let's take a look at the devil."

By the first of August two four-wheeled wagons and two carts loaded with provisions and baggage were being pulled over the hills which separate the Missouri from the Yellowstone River. They were the first vehicles to cross the unoccupied waste of that country. Both the white men and Indians wore heavy gloves in spite of the midsummer heat, and tied sacks of gauze over their heads, for the air danced with millions of mosquitoes. All day and all night the maddening treble buzz continued without even that relief which the crescendo of a locust's song affords. The insects swarmed over the backs of the animals, they flew into their ears, they hovered on their eyelids until it was necessary to unsaddle the tortured beasts during the noon rest that they might roll on the ground.

On the second day, after passing among heaps of red and white clay and piles of stone, the travelers entered a desert cov-

ered with conical lava hills, small and large, grouped together on the level plain.

On the third day the mosquitoes disappeared.

"There must be a buffalo herd," Culbertson said. "The critters'll leave a man any time for bison meat."

An hour later from the crest of a hill they gazed over a broad valley so populous with buffalo that the vegetation was hidden. The bellowing thundered like a tempestuous sea beating against rock. The animals were tumbling about, rolling on the ground, filling the air with clouds of dust. Some, digging their horns into the earth, tossed sand over their bodies in a frenzy to rid themselves of the pests that persecuted them. Day after day, while the men crossed dried-up streams and clambered down the slopes of precipitous gulches, they heard the roar of the bison as they moved westward taking the insects with them.

Beyond burnt hills where no game could be found, and only lizards and rattlesnakes crawled under the twisted wormwood, lay an evil land. The Indians, fearing it, would have turned back, but Father DeSmet urged them on, spurring his own pony to take the lead. This was the heart of the Rocky Mountains, where the earth rumbled and cracked open, and from a thousand crevices sulphurous gases infected the air. The horses, hot and thirsty, found no respite, for the springs gushing from hillsides poured forth boiling water, and the red and yellow pools were foul.

Sometimes they camped by the banks of a river, in the shade of larch trees and protecting pines. Sometimes they crossed high plains and pitched their tents where only cacti and artemisia grew. When the horses' hoofs trampled the desert plants, thorns sprang up and stuck in their legs and bellies, so that the animals cried out and pawed the air in pain; and the Indians, beating them quiet with rawhide whips, crawled under their legs to extract the thorns. Once they rode over a desert that sparkled in the sunlight as if it were diamond-studded; and when they dismounted, Father DeSmet peeled big slabs of mica from the ground, imagining how some Spaniard in the Golden Age seeing it from afar might have dreamed he had found a country paved with jewels.

For four days they followed a river with perpendicular banks, winding in a serpentine course through a narrow valley. In a distance of three miles they had to cross it ten or twelve times at the risk of killing the animals and destroying their wagons. The soil was sterile. Water grew scarce. On the fifth day it failed. All night the men lay clawing their parched throats. The next morning they found a stagnant pool five miles beyond.

By the first of September the horses, sorefooted and lean, could scarcely drag their loads. One cart had been broken beyond repair. The wagons were tied together with strips of raw buffalo hide. The clothing of the men was torn.

"We'll get to the Oregon Trail before night," Culbertson said.

It seemed to Father DeSmet that the journey from Fort Union had been like the allegory of a man's life. Fresh and eager they had started out across a fertile valley, but mountain canyons and deserts and drouth had obstructed their progress. Now at last, worn-out, ragged, sick with the smell of sage and sulphur, they were coming to the Oregon Trail. Would not an old man after too much sorrow come to Heaven in just that way?

The Indians, who had never seen the Trail before, cried out with wonder. It was wide and as smooth as a barn floor swept by the winds, and on either side of it, as far as the eye could see, the grass had been cropped to the roots. One of the Crows wheeled his horse about and rode up to the priest. "Father," he exclaimed, "I think all the people in the land of the rising sun must have gone over this. A great void, is there, where you live?"

The priest smiled. "The people in my land do not even miss those who have passed here."

The Indians whipped their horses down the road and examined a camping place nearby. They filled their pouches with knives, forks, spoons, and bits of earthenware which emigrants had left behind them. It was hot and the dust of the road was deep. Their horses stirred up clouds of dirt that burned the men's eyes and filled their lungs. Before the day was over they passed bleached bones of cattle, mounds of hastily made graves, furniture, stoves, farm implements, and even discarded wagons.



For eight desiccate days they followed the Oregon Trail. No trees tempered the sweltering sunlight. Scorching winds whirled eddies of sand and dust down the road into the faces of the travelers. The water from the Platte was mud-thick and polluted by thousands of cattle that had waded in it.

Once in the morning they met a wagon-train of emigrants. Father DeSmet saw them in the distance, an immense, confused army of cattle and men and covered wagons under clouds of yellow dust. As they drew near he saw that there were two columns of wagons, with loose stock herded between. On either side, however, cows, young cattle, horses, and footmen swarmed over the naked prairie.

"Now we'll have news from Fort Laramie," Culbertson said, shading his eyes with his hand.

"*Mon Dieu!* How many there are!" It seemed to Father DeSmet that a whole city was moving towards him. Now and then when the cattle scattered too far over the prairie a horseman galloped off and drove them back.

Culbertson ordered the Indians to ride on making a circle around the caravan. He and Father DeSmet kept in the road, hoping to obtain some news.

Captain Jess Hall, seeing two riders coming down the road, flicked his mare with the stub of a riding whip and trotted ahead of the wagons. Between his full, dark beard and the hat pulled low on his forehead, his cheek-bones were as brown as a horse's flank.

"Are you all headin' for Missouri?" he shouted in a drawl, and added before the men could reply, "Are them there Indians all right? We ain't aimin' to have no trouble along the way."

"They ain't botherin' you," Culbertson said somewhat testily. "We're goin' to Fort Laramie. What's the news up there?"

"They got enough Indians to wipe us out. Havin' a big shindig of some sort. Looks like they was breedin' 'em like cattle."

"Did you camp at the fort?" DeSmet asked.

"Naw. Got the horses shoed there. Ain't nobody around."

"I thought you said it was full of Indians," Culbertson said.

"They ain't at the fort. They're up the road that way."

"They're supposed to be at the fort."

"The blacksmith says they was till the air got to stinkin' so bad they had to pull out."

"The air got to stinking?" Father DeSmet was perplexed.

"From dead animals and rotten food. Besides, the horses ate up all the grass. Have you two come from Californy or Oregon?"

"Just from the Big Horns," DeSmet said.

"Any trouble ahead?"

"No. The Trail's clear as far as we've come," Culbertson put in. "Water's pretty bad. Good luck to you."

He swung his horse about and rode off to the side to avoid the caravan. Father DeSmet followed him. But they had not been quick enough. The wagons had already overtaken Captain Hall, and the two men found themselves caught in a melee of cattle and horses. Although the animals, being thin and underfed, moved slowly, it was almost impossible to break through. A young girl with a flowered sunbonnet and skirts spread over the neck of her pony galloped up and began driving the cattle back. "They won't hurt you," she called out sympathetically. "They're near dead anyhow."

All afternoon Father DeSmet and Culbertson traveled across the barren plain, and all afternoon the wagons jogged along the dusty road. There were hundreds of them. Torn strips of canvas black with dust flapped in the wind. The cattle fell back from exhaustion and were driven forward again by the herders. Calves stumbled on weak legs, calling to their mothers in vain. And always the yellow dust hung over them like a curse.

Father DeSmet was quiet. He had seen thousands of emigrants dumped from steamboats at St. Louis, but even then he had not realized their full significance. This was but one caravan. Hundreds like it had already passed over that road. Hundreds would still follow. An angry bitterness crept into his heart not toward the emigrants nor the fur traders but toward that immeasurably cruel force pushing forever onward, heedless of what it crushed—the force named civilization. Philosophers had called it "progressive," but they lied. Historians had called it "Christian," but they blasphemed. To Father DeSmet riding among the deso-

late gray sage it was synonymous with "death." The grass under the horses' hoofs was dead; so were the blank, treeless buttes jutting against the sky. Not even a strident magpie flew across his path. "I have lost Oregon," he thought disconsolately; "I have lost Oregon forever." But in that moment he felt as if he had lost the world.

Culbertson turned to speak, but when he saw the priest telling his beads he looked away.

## 4

Early one September morning at Fort Laramie a number of Mexicans were bringing pails of warm milk from the cow barns to the kitchen. They had been employed when American laborers one after one threw down their tools and set out for the California gold fields. The sun was not yet over the horizon, and the cold autumn air gave no hint of the burning day that was to follow. Under the workmen's feet the stiff, curled grasses hissed. The steam from the milk pails was warm and sweet. The men spoke in their native language, keeping their voices low as they had been instructed to do when out before the breakfast hour.

"*Dios!*" one of them said. "Did you see the priest?"

"What priest?" another asked.

"The big man that came last night with the Indians."

"Ah, José," an old man put in, "your conscience troubles you. Next time perhaps you won't sleep with another man's squaw. Are you going to confess?"

"*Por la Virgen, no!* Did you think that Ramón was married to her?"

"Is the priest going to stay?" one of the Mexicans asked.

"How should I know? The Indians rode on, but the padre went to bed in the commander's house."

"I saw him come. He is not Spanish."

"*Madre de Dios*, he can forgive sins, can't he?"

"*Sí*," José snapped, "and he can give penances also. I have enough to do without that."

"The tan cow with the white spot does not like me," the old man said. "Besides, she's stingy with her milk."

They had reached the kitchen door. The cook was standing over the stove. He was a fat, dark-skinned man of obscure race. "Get some ice from the ice-house," he said to José in English. "A pitcher full. Hurry. It is for the priest and he'll soon be down."

"Is he going to live here?" José asked.

"No, but he's got to eat. Get a move on you."

As José went to the ice-house he passed the stable. Major Sanderson's favorite horse was being harnessed to the surrey.

"Is the major going away?" José asked the Negro groom.

"No, it's for the priest."

The answer completely satisfied José. There would be no time for confessions. When he returned with the pitcher of ice, breakfast was already being carried into the mess-hall. Since it was an hour before rising time, Major Sanderson, Father DeSmet, Alexander Culbertson, and Robert Campbell had the dining-room to themselves.

"Everything's friendly now," Sanderson said, "thanks to the quick wit of Louis LeBon."

"Louis LeBon, who is he?" Father DeSmet asked.

"One of the interpreters, and a damned good fellow." Sanderson put down his knife and fork. "I apologize for this pork, Father DeSmet."

"It's very good, Major, better than the beaver and prairie grouse we have been eating for the last month."

"I'm afraid it's very bad. Since the first days of the gold rush, we've had seven cooks. They won't stay. Well, the Sioux and Cheyennes arrived first. Then about noon one day last week Washakie rode in with the Snakes. When the Sioux squaws saw their enemies, they did just what we expected. They set up a howl, and some fool warrior sprang on his horse and rushed out with bow and arrow raised. I was with Bridger and he said, 'I knew it would end like this.' But Louis was already on his horse after the Sioux. He got him down, disarmed him, and brought him back to camp. After that we had no trouble."

Campbell said, "The Sioux wouldn't have had a chance with their bows and arrows. Every man behind Washakie had a gun."



"I don't see how you've kept things quiet," said Culbertson. "The Sioux are like dynamite."

The cook brought in more coffee and began refilling the cups.

"Well, we put the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes on one side of the river, and the Snakes farther down on the other side. Then we stationed the troops between."

"You ain't got many soldiers, have you?" Culbertson asked.

"Two hundred."

"Not many to handle six or seven thousand Indians."

"We've kept the natives busy showing off," Sanderson explained, "parades and tournaments and games of one sort or another. And the squaws have been fixing up the council ground. There's only one big problem left. The supplies got out of Westport two weeks late. We've promised presents to everyone, and they won't be here until the council's over with."

"They'll wait, Major. The Indians'll wait forever," Culbertson said. "But if anything happens to them wagons and they don't get no gifts, then God help us."

By the time the men had finished eating, the surrey was at the door.

"It'll be dusty," the major warned as he watched the men get into the carriage. "But you should see the road in early summer after the spring rains. It's better than cobblestones then, as smooth as a ballroom floor."

"We've eaten dust for eight days," DeSmet said, laughing. "I guess we can stand it for one more."

"You got a good-looking rig here." Culbertson was filled with admiration.

The surrey was truly beautiful. It had been newly painted and the lamps were highly polished. The major's mare held her head proudly. Her mane had been cut close and her tail, braided and looped, was tied with a scarlet ribbon.

In a moment the men were off, the horses briskly trotting down the Oregon Trail.

Mitchell's tent stood in the fork where Horse Creek flows into the Platte. East of the creek and on both sides of the river

the Indians had pitched their tepees. Hundreds of them were scattered far over the plains. Since the natives had already been camped several days, the grass was badly cropped away and the ground littered with refuse.

"May the Lord bless you," Father DeSmet said as he got out of the carriage and embraced the superintendent. "I hear your children are well behaved."

"So far we have everything to be thankful for. But I'll sleep better now that you're here. Hello, Culbertson. So you got through all right, and Campbell brought you down. You're in good time too."

The priest shook the dust from his cassock. "Well, what are we to do?"

"Rest here for a while, or, if you prefer, ride over to the parade grounds and see the Cheyennes perform."

DeSmet looked at Culbertson. "What do you say?"

"Mitchell hasn't got no food around. We can at least get a roast dog on the other side of the crick."

Campbell was tired. "If you've got something to sleep on, I'll stay here, Mitchell."

Horses were saddled and the men rode to the parade ground. The noise and confusion of Indians, horses, and dogs was deafening. Everywhere groups of squaws and young girls wandered about. They were dressed lavishly for the festival, in strings of wampum, bracelets, porcupine quills, and feathers. The men's faces were streaked with red, blue, and green paint. Those on foot had to kick the dogs from their path. For the most part the natives were unaware of Father DeSmet's arrival. Everyone was moving in a shifting, colorful circle around the parade ground, in the center of which the Cheyennes were giving an exhibition of military maneuvers. The braves were painted and dressed in war costume, armed with guns, lances, or bows and arrows. The long, loose manes of their horses had been dyed with gaudy colors. On the flanks of each mount were painted the symbols of the owner's *coups*—the record of enemies slain, scalps taken, and horses stolen. Weaving out and in, twisting, turning, forming patterns and dissolving them, the Cheyennes

astonished the white men by their precision and terrified the other natives by suddenly firing guns, shooting arrows, yelling, and charging as if they would trample the bystanders under their horses' hoofs.

Father DeSmet and his companions watched them for some time, but when the drums began to beat and weird songs struck the air, they moved on.

All at once a cannon was fired. Someone raised the American flag on a staff which had been improvised by lashing three lodge-poles together.

Mitchell drew his horse up. "It must be the Crows," he said.

Crossing the open prairie and singing lustily, the Crows came in single file. Every man, woman, and child was mounted. Their long black hair flew out behind them. Their horses were bedecked with crimson cloths and the skins of mountain lions.

"Here come the rich thieves," Mitchell said under his breath. "My God, but they look like kings."

Mitchell and DeSmet rode out to meet them. The chiefs dismounted and pipes were passed around. When they had been directed to their camp ground, one of the chiefs turned to the priest, "Stay, Father, and eat with us. We are great liars and thieves. We have killed; we have done all the evil that the Great Spirit forbids us to do. But stay with us."

While tepees were pitched hastily and fires built, Father DeSmet chatted with the Crows. Many were his friends; none had forgotten the earlier visits he had paid them. Two squaws came to the chief's lodge bringing a number of small, fat dogs, which they plunged, skins and all, into a kettle of boiling water. Later the fattest was placed on a wooden platter and presented to the missionary. Father DeSmet was desperately hungry. Once the skin had been stripped off, he found the dog more tasty than a suckling pig.

"Father, we have faith in you," the chief said solemnly. "We are here to make promises and to receive them. Will the Great White Father keep his promise?"

"I hope so and I believe so," Father DeSmet answered.

When the tenderest parts of the dogs had been consumed, bowls of stew were distributed.

"It is a good dish," Father DeSmet said to one of the squaws. "How do you make it?"

The woman, flattered by the attention, squatted on the floor beside the priest. Her scalp had been painted vermilion where the hair was parted, and when she bent her head in the firelight it seemed to be bleeding. "It is plums and deer meat. We gather the fruit and suck the stones out. It is good to suck them. They are sweet and juicy. We mix the fruit with meat."

Never before had so many Indians been gathered together. The smoke from their fires hung like a fog over the prairie. The smell of food cooking, the occasional growling of dogs, and the stamping of horses made Father DeSmet feel at home. Quarrels had been forgotten. Friends and enemies were living together; the sons of the murdered had forgiven the murderers.

"It is wonderful," the priest said when he returned to Mitchell's tent. "The Snakes and Cheyennes are smoking together. It is peace, a splendid peace that our government has made between these tribes."

"You are a dreamer still," Mitchell said. "It is no peace, Father. They are waiting for the gifts we promised them."

"Perhaps you are right; but if the boundary lines are made clear . . ."

"Confound the boundary lines. We'll set them, but it won't do any good. What we want now and all we can hope to get, Father, is the Oregon Trail. If we can get the Indians to leave the white men alone, that's enough. In six weeks the Snakes and Cheyennes will be chewing each other's throats."

"We shall see," DeSmet replied patiently; "we shall see who keep their word the longest—the natives or the Americans. By the way, is there any chance that Congress may not ratify the treaty?"

Mitchell frowned. "God, no! They'll be so thankful it will go through without a dissenting vote."



## 5

On the first day of the Great Council the native camps were astir early. When the cannon was fired Indians commenced moving from all directions in stately processions toward the council ground. Each tribe was in military formation; each wore its own peculiar gala dress; each sang its own songs. Under the flaps of the tepees behind them lay the bows and arrows, the guns and lances they had cast aside. It was the great day of everlasting peace.

The council ground was a circle two-thirds of which was enclosed by sheds made of lodge-skins and poles. The east part of it was left open. The chiefs of the various nations, the government representatives, and the interpreters were seated within the circle. Behind squatted the warriors of each tribe, and still farther back, crowded together, stood the eager, black-eyed women and children.

Between Tom Fitzpatrick and D. D. Mitchell sat Father DeSmet, his long gray hair and black cassock conspicuous among the many-colored costumes of fur traders, natives, and half-breeds. As he looked over that immense, dark-faced assembly something of the old enthusiasm came back to him. It was as if all the warring countries of Europe had assembled for the cause of peace. For the first time in his life the priest stood shoulder to shoulder with the American government. At this council justice was to be granted. The Indians, who had been harassed and tricked and driven and hunted down like dogs, had at last come together like men to draw up a boundary line and to make promises that should last forever.

A calumet of red pipestone, with a three-foot stem covered with beads and hair, was passed around. Mitchell smoked it first, then Fitzpatrick; then it was handed from chief to chief. The silence of this ceremony was impressive. Not a squaw moved; not a child cried out. Every eye was fixed on the men who were smoking together. At last Mitchell stood up. Father DeSmet thought that he cut a sorry figure compared to the Indian braves.

He was short, broad-shouldered, and heavy. He had a tendency to slouch and he kept his hands in his pockets.

With the aid of an interpreter he explained to the Indians that he and Thomas Fitzpatrick had been sent by the Great White Father to make peace with the tribes. They knew that the buffalo were becoming scarce, that the emigrant's cattle were eating the grass. The Great Father wanted to make compensation. The white men wished to pass over the roads leading to the west; they wished to build military posts for their protection. They hoped that the Indians would agree to define the limits of each tribe's territory and to live in peace with one another and with the white men. For this the Great Father would give them annually for a period of fifty years fifty thousand dollars in goods, merchandise, and provisions. The Great Father had sent a train of ox-wagons with presents for all.

Instantly a chief of the Arapahoes stood up, straight and tall, his eyes haughty, his mouth firm. When he spoke his voice sounded like stones dropped from a mountain crag onto bare rock beneath. "I thank the Great Spirit for putting me on this earth. It is a good earth. I hope there will be no more fighting on it, that the grass will grow and the water fall, and that there will be plenty of buffalo. You will do us much good. I will go home satisfied. I will sleep sound and not have to watch my horses in the night or be afraid for my squaws and children. We have to live on these streams and in the hills, and I would be glad if the whites would pick out a place for themselves and not come into our grounds."

Other chiefs made similar speeches. Then the council broke up. Thus they met each morning for several days. Maps were drawn and boundary lines defined. Finally the treaty itself was prepared. Sentence by sentence Mitchell read and explained it. With gravity the chiefs made crosses by their names. At last the document, attested by white witnesses, was ready for presentation to the United States Senate.

The wagon train had not yet come. All afternoon the Indians danced and feasted. The grazing grounds had already become barren. When the wind blew, clouds of dust pitted against the

tepees. The stench from refuse was sickening. To escape the filth, the troops moved two miles down the river, but the government agents and fur traders felt obliged to remain at camp.

In the days that followed, morning, noon, and night Fitzpatrick mounted his pony and rode far down the trail, looking for the supply wagons. Meanwhile, Father DeSmet was busy. He visited each of the tribes; he taught the prayers; he baptized children; he ate roast dogs and was happy, quite unaware of the growing concern which his companions felt. Then one night Mitchell and Fitzpatrick sat in the superintendent's tent discussing the situation. The priest stood by the door-flap, his back to the men. He could hear drums beating on the other side of Horse Creek. The Indians were dancing. Now and then, when the drums ceased a moment, the shrieks of the squaws pierced the air like the howling of mad wolves.

"Anything might have happened to the wagons," Mitchell said. "I don't know how long we can put them off."

"We may have set a trap for ourselves," Tom Fitzpatrick remarked as he lit his pipe. "My God, if they massacre us, it'll be a pretty page in the history books."

Father DeSmet was looking at the night sky. The air was frosty. He could almost touch the stars. That day he had baptized two hundred and fifty-three Cheyennes, the day before two hundred and eight Sioux. A star fell, making a white streak down the sky. Underneath, the horizon was red from lighted fires.

Culbertson rode up, dismounted, and tethered his horse. His face was drawn. It looked pale in the starlight. "I don't like this," he said. "Have you heard anything?"

"Heard anything?" DeSmet asked. "What's the matter, Culbertson?"

"There ain't nothin' the matter, Father, but them God-damned wagons. The Indians act all right, but you can't tell . . ."

"You're tired, Culbertson. It has been hard work. You will feel better in the morning."

"Feel better! I'll feel a damned sight worse. A man ain't goin' to sleep none on a night like this. I ain't afraid of a good down-right Indian battle. It's the uncertainty of this thing, not knowin'

if them good-for-nothin' baubles got dumped in the Platte, and what'll happen tomorrow."

Father DeSmet looked at the fur trader with an irritation which even the night could not conceal. "If you don't trust the Indians beyond that, Culbertson, your treaty is no good."

"A lot you know about it," Culbertson retorted and pushed past the missionary into the tent.

Father DeSmet smelled whisky. The men continued to grumble behind him. They were afraid. Not forever would the natives be content with their games. Within an hour they could slaughter every white man on the council grounds. That very afternoon the chiefs had met and smoked together, and who could guess the nature of their business?

Across Horse Creek a hundred bonfires tinged the night sky. Like an ominous warning the beating drums and shrieks of the women shattered the frosty air.

The priest went into the tent. Culbertson was slouched in his chair; Fitzpatrick was stretched full length on a buffalo robe; Mitchell held his head in his hands.

"What are they doing now?" Mitchell asked.

"What are they doing?" Father DeSmet repeated slowly.

"The savages. Who do you suppose I mean? Is that God-damn dance going to last forever?"

The priest poured himself a glass of whisky and stood in the center of the room, looking at the men. At that moment he found them unmistakably inferior to the Indians they had come to subdue. There was no mildness in the priest's face now. "After all the years you have been on the plains, you don't know the Indians yet."

"We know them too well," Fitzpatrick said.

"Every promise the American government has made is a joke," the missionary continued. "The natives have paid in blood and starvation for every treaty they have signed. They paid that price because they thought our word was as good as theirs. Mitchell, the Indians do not sign peace treaties one day and massacre the white men the next."

"You read your own virtues into the devils," Mitchell said.



"And you read your own vices into them," DeSmet replied. He put down the empty whisky glass noisily. "I'll make all of you a proposition. Tomorrow morning go back to Fort Laramie; take as many of the troops as you wish—all of them, if you want to. I'll stay here. When the wagons come I'll distribute the presents. If they don't come, I guarantee the Indians will go home in peace."

"My God, no!" Fitzpatrick cried, jumping to his feet. "Do you think we're greenhorns, that we haven't been up against things like this before?"

"No, I don't think that. I think only that the Indians are my people, that I love them, and that I have faith in them."

Mitchell smiled sick-heartedly. "Father DeSmet, it's a pity you're a priest instead of a general. Hell, an army would stand to the last soul with you in command."

"Well, it wouldn't stand with me now," Father DeSmet said, chuckling, "because I'm going to bed."

The following day, taking an interpreter, the priest crossed the Platte River to visit the Arapahoes. On the outskirts of camp naked children were running after prairie dogs. An arrow-maker, who sat in front of his tepee splitting and scraping wild turkey feathers, emptied his mouth of deer intestines to return Father DeSmet's greeting, and when the priest had passed stuffed them into his mouth again. They had to be thoroughly softened with saliva before he could bind feathers and willow withes together. One of the squaws had spread a buffalo robe on the ground and was beating it with a wooden adze. Everywhere flies swarmed over the refuse and debris scattered about.

Father DeSmet found the Arapahoe chief seated in the shade of his door-flap. Between his knees sat his wife. He was plaiting her hair. Smiling at the priest, he bade him be seated on the ground and continued to occupy himself with his wife's hair. The squaw also smiled at their guest. Father DeSmet watched them curiously. The hideous scars which covered the Indian's face contrasted oddly with the gentle, almost caressing manner in which he handled his wife's tresses.

When the silence had become strained, Father DeSmet asked

through his interpreter, "When you leave the council, where will you go?"

"To hunt buffalo," the chief replied, never once lifting his eyes from his work.

"Will you be late?" the priest asked.

The Arapahoe shrugged his shoulders. "The buffalo wait. When the presents come, we go." He began oiling the woman's braids with as much care as a French *friseur*.

"The gifts have a long way to come. They are in wagons. If the Pawnees attacked the white men and took them, or if the wagons were upset in the river, the presents would not get here."

One of the braids dropped against the squaw's shoulder. "They are promised," the Arapahoe said. "We do not make promises we cannot keep. White men do the same. We wait for the presents."

A toothless old woman emerged from a nearby tepee and started to cast stones at a group of dogs which were gnawing some cast-off buffalo sinews. As the animals ran toward Father DeSmet, the chief also began pelting them so that they were driven back upon the old woman.

Across the river a cannon was fired. The supply wagons had pulled into camp and were being corralled. At once the Arapahoe village was in confusion. Braves, squaws, and children ran for their horses. The dogs followed, barking at their heels. The ponies were whipped into the Platte River with as much splashing and shouting as if the Indians had been charging an enemy.

By the time Father DeSmet had reached the council grounds the merchandise had been unloaded and piled on the ground, and each tribe had been assigned a section of the area encircling the goods. The chiefs received uniforms with bright-colored epaulettes. At once the Indians stripped to their breechclouts and donned their gifts. Bolts of calico, beads, knives, and mirrors were distributed to the squaws.

The priest found Mitchell standing behind immense piles of supplies, giving out orders to all the Indians he could rally to help him. It was necessary to divide the gifts according to tribal rank that jealousy might be avoided. Mitchell held three pink

parasols in his hand. "What will we do with these?" he asked in perplexity.

Before DeSmet could offer a suggestion one of the interpreters had snatched them away. Later the parasols reappeared hanging from the belts of three Sioux.

An Indian brave had placed a lady's poke-bonnet on top of his eagle feathers. The squaw beside him was wearing a tin pan on her head. Fitzpatrick and Mitchell saw nothing laughable in this. They were happy and the Indians were happy. The Great Council of 1851 was closing in triumph for everyone.

Toward nightfall tepees were struck and the villages began to move off in all directions. The fantastic costumes of feathers and beaver hats, deerskins and waistcoats, and ruffled petticoats topped with buffalo robes made a ludicrous picture on the plains.

As the last cavalcade disappeared in the distance, the white men stood together in an immense waste of dusty prairie. Not a blade of grass was left growing. A foul odor rose from rotten food and decaying meat, but the flies had followed the Indian ponies.

"Well, this looks like a battlefield," Fitzpatrick remarked, laughing.

"May the winter snows cover it soon," Father DeSmet said.

Culbertson kicked a fragment of broken pottery. "It's damned cold right now. You ain't got a swig in your tent, have you, Mitchell?"

"We've got enough whisky, Culbertson, to last till dawn."

## VIII

### It Is Our Wickedness

1858

#### I

When DeSmet returned to St. Louis after the Great Council of 1851, he found that Father Elet had been dead three months. His successor, Father William Stack Murphy, was shouldering the burdens of the vice-province with surprising energy and acumen. An Easterner and a man of the world, he had a quick eye for the immediate concerns about him. The progressive spirit of St. Louis suited his taste; and his ready wit had already won him the friendship of the enterprising, optimistic world which moved outside the walls of the Society. From the moment of Father DeSmet's return he looked upon the priest not as a missionary, but as a diplomatic servant of the United States Government. He either gave cursory attention to the problems of the Rocky Mountain missions, or when the missionary persisted, he dismissed them with a quick gesture of his hand. There was trouble enough at home for Father Murphy.

Indeed, to all appearances the vice-provincial was justified in his attitude toward Father DeSmet. Indian agents and military officers turned more and more to the missionary for help. They had come to realize that upon his assistance depended the goodwill of the natives. At all hours of the day they called upon him for counsel, until gradually the priest discovered that the greater part of his time was devoted to keeping the United States Government informed of the disposition of this or that tribe, the possibility of shifting a boundary line, or the need for an additional military post.

Of all the Jesuits at St. Louis University only Brother John



remained to whom the priest could turn in his despair. The thin, ascetic lay brother would follow him about like a faithful dog. If the priest asked his advice, his face would brighten with pleasure; and before giving an answer, he would lay a finger along his prominent humped nose and remain absorbed in thought. It seemed to Father DeSmet that Brother John understood everything; but his greatest gift was the ability to understand silences. A glance at the missionary's face told him more than an hour of conversation. In a quiet, humble way his companionship eased the pain and the loneliness which Father DeSmet felt at the loss of Fathers Elet and Hoecken, and at the world about him, which grew more and more alien to those interests which he held at heart.

One afternoon when the missionary had returned from a visit to the levee, he called Brother John to his room. "How long have they been working on the Pacific railroad?" he asked.

"Construction was started July fourth, Father, but it will take a long time."

DeSmet nodded. "You mean it will not be done until I am dead. Brother John, do you not think that I have sold my soul to the devil?"

The lay brother started. "Father Pierre, are you mad?"

"You know as well as I do that these men who come to my office are the enemies of the Flatheads and the Sioux and all the people to whom I have pledged my life."

Brother John sat down on the edge of a chair and held his chin in his hands. "Perhaps the Father Provincial will let you go back to the mountains."

"I think not," the missionary said, shaking his head. "He feels that it is advantageous to the Jesuits to have one of their members serving the government. Besides, Father Murphy is not interested in the missions. I do not criticize him for that. He is a practical man, and he knows that the Bitter Root Valley in the end will only be a road to Oregon and a huddle of farms. Furthermore, he must have heard tales about my work which were not—which would perhaps prejudice him."

Brother John reddened. "The Father Provincial is not easily persuaded by gossip."

"If it be God's will that I stay here," DeSmet said, "I am content. But I cannot think it is God's will that I play lackey to these men who are building railroads and military posts and tricking the savages into poverty and death. Do you know, Brother John, that there is some talk of transferring the Oregon missions to the Province of Turin?"

Brother John made a wry face.

"From a financial standpoint, it appears to be sensible," DeSmet said, "but it is like disinheriting one's children."

"Father Pierre, if you must stay in St. Louis, I think there is only one way you can help the Indians."

"What is that?" the priest asked.

"By working with these men for the sake of the Indians."

"That is what I thought at first. Now it seems different. I pretend to be their friend, but my one desire is to thwart their schemes."

"You are their friend," the brother corrected. "You want to keep them from evil. That is always the priest's task."

Father DeSmet smiled. "That is a kind way of putting it, Brother John. I hope you are right."

Twice the missionary was sent to Europe on business of the Society. Each time he returned to find the restless confusion of the United States more ominous than before. In New York European emigrants were crowded into foul, unsanitary tenements. St. Louis was overflowing with them. Gold-seekers and settlers still poured across the prairies. Agitation against slavery was increasing. There was even talk of armed rebellion.

It seemed to Father DeSmet that no hope remained, either for America or for the Indians. The dream of re-establishing the Paraguayan missions was dead. The treaty which the tribes had signed at the Great Council of 1851 had been ratified by the Senate only after the period of annuities was reduced from fifty years to fifteen. The complexities of governmental procedure could never be explained to the Indians. So far as they were con-

cerned, the United States had broken its promise. Father DeSmet felt desolate.

Then came the dismaying news that the tribes of the Rocky Mountains, shocked by incursions of white emigrants into their lands, had attacked and killed several officers of the American army. A thousand armed warriors were said to be in open defiance. General William S. Harney was commissioned to proceed at once to Oregon for the purpose of punishing the offenders. He asked Father DeSmet to accompany him. Horror-struck, the priest went to his superior.

"I know General Harney," he said, as he paced the floor of the vice-provincial's office. "He believes in exterminating the Indians. I cannot go West with him and march against the people I love."

"But General Harney wants you to go merely as chaplain," Father Murphy insisted patiently.

"General Harney and his men want no chaplain. They are murderers."

Father Murphy pushed the silver-rimmed spectacles higher on his nose. "Father Pierre, war is not murder," he said severely.

"The Flatheads have never lifted a finger against the white men," the missionary continued heatedly. "If they and the Coeur d'Alenes are in rebellion, it is with good cause."

"Perhaps," the vice-provincial conceded. "But here in St. Louis you will learn nothing of that cause. Harney won't bother to discover it. If you go with him, you can see that these savages in whom you have so much faith are treated in a spirit of justice and not of vengeance."

"Harney can't treat anyone with justice," Father DeSmet said. "'Squaw-killer,' the traders out West call him. In the battle of Ash Hollow he massacred the women and children as well as the men. He brought the Seminole War to an end by hanging thirteen chiefs. Father Provincial, I would lay down my life for the Flatheads, and instead I am asked to serve the men who are setting out to kill them."

Father Murphy smiled slightly. "I think, Father Pierre, that you are reacting to this request with more emotion than wisdom."

The missionary looked squarely into the face of his superior. "Father Murphy, I have always found my faith more dependable than my intellect."

The vice-provincial shrugged his shoulders. "A Jesuit does not often have the opportunities that are offered you. It is right that you consider not only the Indians but the welfare of the Society."

Father DeSmet sat down. His face was almost as gray as his hair; his hands trembled. "Long before we get to Oregon the Indians will hear that I am traveling with the hostile forces."

"I believe General Harney plans to go by way of Panama."

"He does."

"Then the Indians need not know that you have come until you are in Vancouver. Your arrival on the same boat which brings the officers might be coincidental."

Father DeSmet's mouth twitched with pain. Further argument was useless.

"It has been a long time since you have seen your friends of the Bitter Root Mountains, Father Pierre."

The missionary thought that there was something slightly patronizing in the vice-provincial's tone, as if he were speaking indulgently to a child. Nevertheless, he forced back the rushing tide of his anger. "Very well, Father Provincial, I will go. I pray God the Indians will believe that I have kept faith with them."

2

The vessel had slipped into Navy Bay under a snowfall of white butterflies driven seaward by the land-wind. Father DeSmet saw the Panama coast through the whirl of their sunlit wings: to the right a black, tangled forest, to the left the bright-colored town of Aspinwall. General William S. Harney and the four United States Army officers who composed his staff were busied with the luggage. Neither this blizzard of helpless wings nor the shining blue water was sufficient to distract them.

Had he been on any other errand the priest would have anticipated eagerly this journey across the Isthmus and north to the mouth of the Columbia River. Already the ship was drawing



near enough for him to discern the over-hanging balconies of gaudily painted Americo-Spanish dwellings. The lower stories of these structures were hidden behind the long, covered wharfs of the water-front, and their roofs were outlined against a background of tropical forest and turquoise mountains. Yet the sharp, luminous beauty of the scene gave him no pleasure. The knowledge that the Oregon tribes were warring against the whites left a dark coldness in his heart, a coldness that even the hot land-wind with its burden of white butterflies could not dispel. The commandants of forts in the Northwest had written disturbing and contradictory reports. Although it was said that nine tribes had entered into the hostile coalition, Father DeSmet could not yet believe that the Coeur d'Alenes and Flatheads were numbered among them.

The priest hoped that General Harney was going on a mission of peace, yet in the past the general's laurels had not been won in that way. He had simpler and more lasting methods. He had ridden out to meet the Kansas, shouting to his men, "By God, I am for war!" Now, with the old scarred face of a fighting bull, he was going to Oregon; and, oddly enough, this man who hated the Indians was taking with him the man who loved them most.

"The captain says we may have to wait an hour for the cars," the general said as he joined the priest. "The wind's hot but at least it's dry." He spoke with an unnecessary emphasis which gave his words a slightly oratorical quality.

The snowfall of butterflies had thinned, but the vessel's deck was strewn with dead or broken-winged insects. Looking at them, Father DeSmet thought of the Flatheads. "Yes, at least it's dry," he agreed absently.

Since the completion of the railroad the Panama route had become popular among emigrants to California. Every day they crowded from ships dropping anchor in the Aspinwall harbor and boarded the cars waiting nearby. The bulk of the freighting business, however, was not from the United States, but from South and Central America.

General Harney, having left his carpet bags in the care of

his staff, accompanied the priest along the crowded wharf to the grove of cocoanut trees at its upper end, whose harvest of fruit and flowers the wind threatened to cast down upon the passersby. To the left of the wharf stretched Aspinwall's main street, flanked by the flimsy frame buildings which served as hotels, gambling dens, and saloons. Looking toward it from the cocoanut grove, the men could see a slowly moving pattern of brown skin and white clothing, and long lines of heavily burdened donkeys. As if unconsciously wishing to escape the smell of sweating bodies and cheap rum, they turned to the right, in the opposite direction from the city street, and followed the railroad tracks to the warehouses and marketplace. Although they walked slowly, the damp, hot wind flushed their faces so that before long they were forced to seek shelter in the shade of a cattle car from which a load of mild-eyed lamas looked quizzically down upon them.

General Harney took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "It's hell," he grumbled impatiently. "Three weeks on the Oregon Trail are easier than three hours of this inferno."

"We might get ice-water in town."

Harney glanced down the tracks toward the burning city street. "That town's nothing but a cesspool."

A Spaniard emerged from the freight depot. He was dressed in a loose shirt and hempen trousers, the usual native costume. The sight of the army officer and priest standing in the shade of a freight car must have interested him, for he paused and stared almost discourteously. Three of the lamas had pushed their chins over the side of the car and were gazing down upon the two men with expressions of disdainful ennui. The Spaniard recognized the satire of the picture. Smiling, he crossed the street.

"Our lamas do not like Yankees," he said in broken English. "I apologize for them. They are impertinent." He accented the last word on the third syllable.

General Harney stiffened somewhat, but Father DeSmet, turning about, looked at the insolent beasts and laughed out-

right. "Perhaps they blame us for the railroad that takes them to market."

"Then they are unjust," the Spaniard replied, studying with beadlike eyes the two men so evidently mismatched. "You are the United States Army?" he asked the officer hesitantly, almost shyly.

"General William S. Harney," Father DeSmet interposed quickly to avert a rebuff from his companion. "And I am Pierre Jean DeSmet, traveling in the capacity of chaplain."

"Señor Manrique is honored," the Spaniard said, bowing from the waist. "I send quina to Cuba. If you wait for the cars, maybe you like to visit the freight house?"

Harney's expression became less formidable. "It will be fine," he said abruptly. "Anything to get out of this damnable wind."

With thin brown hands the Spaniard waved the officer's impatience away. "The general does not like our hot winds? He would like our rains less. The weather of Panama, one wears it like a coat that does not fit."

Inside the massive stone freight depot Señor Manrique led them proudly past cargo piled many tiers deep, identifying each product as he did so: *ceroons* of indigo from San Salvador, coffee from Costa Rica, ivory nuts from Porto Bello, cochineal from Guatemala, copper ore from Bolivia, cacao from Ecuador, gold-bars from California, pearl oyster shells from the fisheries of Panama, and at last bales of quina from the interior. Here Señor Manrique stopped. "Quina!" he said almost reverently. "Five hundred and seventy-four bales! It is a holy tree, the *cichona*. It is blessed by the Holy Virgin."

"Undoubtedly you find the railroad a great advantage," General Harney said, impressed in spite of himself by the magnitude of this export business.

Señor Manrique shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, no. It is a big price to pay to be rich. You go to the graveyard and see."

"But Panama is going to be one of the great shipping centers of the world," the general insisted.

"I do not know. I only ship quina, but I tell you something." The Spaniard placed his palms together as if in prayer, and

looked down at them a moment. "Yes, I tell you. Before, the natives carried the quina in. They liked that. Now some help to keep the tracks clear, but they do not get out of the forest. And others, Señor, they just eat bananas." He pulled a piece of bark from one of the bales and handed it to Father DeSmet. "Keep it," he said. "Then maybe you will pray for me."

General Harney stalked up and down beside the piles of cargo. "Yet with the increased activity of shipping, even the interior of Panama should be civilized in ten years."

Señor Manrique turned from the officer to the gray-haired priest. His eyes shone pathetically in the semi-darkness. "Padre, I hope your friend is wrong. We do not want to be civilized. It is better to live in the forest than that."

Father DeSmet smiled. "The good and evil come together," he said softly.

General Harney twirled upon his heels. "The railroad makes your company big and rich, and yet you don't like it. I can't understand."

"It does not make me rich," Señor Manrique answered. "It makes hurry and bustle and harsh ways. It is the British and Yankees who get rich. We are still poor."

"You'll be better off in the end," Harney said quickly. "Your cities will grow. Why, the traffic from California and the States alone will bring you a fortune."

The Spaniard shook his head. "I do not know. I was rich once, Señor General, a long time ago. It was in Buenos Aires. I got rich in a bad way. Then I was discovered. Now I do penance. You see, I export quina to Cuba not to grow rich, but to save people from the fever. That is my penance. Padre, you understand why I want your prayers?"

Father DeSmet grasped the Spaniard's hand. "I promise that you shall have them."

They left the freight house from the opposite end, blinded for a moment by the hot sunshine. At the native marketplace, *el Mingillo*, some half-naked Negroes were selling fish, cassava, and bananas from out the *bongoes* which lay along the wharf.



A few short, broad-shouldered Indians stood lazily watching them.

"They are from San Blas," Señor Manrique explained. "They are proud. Do you know, the *conquistadores* could never conquer them? Even now they hate us so much that they allow no Spaniards on their shores."

The train was already at the terminal and passengers were boarding it. "*Que lástima!*" the Spaniard sighed. "There is good wine at the hotel."

"Wine is for winter," Harney said rudely, but Señor Manrique was looking at the priest.

"I am sorry," Father DeSmet said, somewhat bewildered by his impromptu host. "We have to go. I shall not forget the prayers."

The officers of the general's staff had been drinking heavily in the Aspinwall saloon, possibly hoping to escape the heat. Consequently, they had arrived at the cars too late to secure seats with the emigrants who had taken passage on their boat. They had finally found a place directly behind the engine. The car was crowded with Indians, Negroes and natives of questionable race. The air was stale and the stationary windows could not be opened.

"My God!" General Harney cried, stooping because the low ceiling did not permit him to stand erect. "So we go with the cattle!"

One of the officers became red in the face.

"It is only for three hours," Father DeSmet said.

But the general was not to be appeased. He called the conductor, a squat, very fat little native who looked exceedingly ludicrous in his blue uniform with its gaudy brass buttons.

"I am General William S. Harney of the United States Army. It is not agreeable for me and my staff to remain in this car."

"*Cómo? No comprendo,*" the conductor replied, bowing in a very friendly manner and rubbing his hands together.

"We want seats in another car," the general said, speaking slowly and with almost bombastic emphasis.

"*No comprendo inglés,*" the conductor repeated.

Father DeSmet was looking out the window so that his back was toward the general. He seemed to take a sudden interest in the streets of Aspinwall.

"Is there anyone in this car who knows English?" General Harney bellowed.

The natives who were awake looked at him with mild curiosity and a bovine stupidity. Those who had already fallen asleep shifted a little as if disturbed in their dreams. General Harney sat down.

"Perhaps the other cars are no less uncomfortable than this," Father DeSmet suggested.

"Idiots! That's what they are!" Harney said. "My God, Father, it's this kind of cattle we fought against at Cerro Gordo."

Father DeSmet glanced at the other passengers. Directly across the aisle sat a young girl with full red lips. Her heavily flounced muslin dress was off at the shoulder, and a small gold cross glittered in the brown hollow of her neck. Beside her sat an older woman, possibly her mother. "A Zambo," the priest concluded, noting the high Indian cheek-bones and kinky negroid hair. In front of them an emaciated, dirty half-breed sprawled over two seats. He had fallen asleep, his mouth open, his chin resting on his chest. Father DeSmet could see, beyond the staff officers, the shiny black head of an Indian and the lower part of his fat yellow cheek. The conductor had disappeared.

The steam whistle shrieked, and with a tremendous lurch the cars moved forward. Wind drove the smoke of the engine along the windows, hiding the view, and the panes were fitted so loosely that almost at once the travelers were showered with soot. The roar of the engine, the rattling of window glass, and the repeated blowing of the whistle made conversation impossible. Presently they rounded a curve and the smoke disappeared. Now the priest could see palm trees fringed with long, scarlet tassels, drooping mangroves, vine-choked *cedro* and *espabe* trees; from the warm ooze of the swampland hundreds of pond-lilies and white and yellow callas lifted their heads. Passing the native town of Gatun, a cluster of cane huts at the edge of a broad

savanna, the train began its slow climb toward the mountains.

"*Agua! Agua!*" a voice shouted behind them.

The men looked around. A native boy, whose back and shoulders dripped with perspiration, was bringing a can of ice-water. Instantly the sleeping passengers were awake. The only glass with which the water-carrier was provided passed from hand to hand. The boy vanished, apparently to refill the container, and returned. The girl in muslin drank from the glass and handed it to her mother. The emaciated man also drank. In spite of his thirst, General Harney shook his head negatively, but Father DeSmet drained two full glasses.

A small gang of natives was clearing away the recent growths along the track, using immense bone-handled *machetes*. As the train approached they drew to one side. One of them caught a glimpse of the priest through the window and made the sign of the cross.

At Frijoli Station the train stopped almost in a patch of scarlet passion-flowers. A bird with an orange breast veered out of the forest and into it again.

The fat little conductor walked through the car, playing with his brass buttons.

"What station is this?" one of the passengers inquired in English.

"Frijoli, sir," the conductor replied.

"So he does know English, the Goddamn fool!" General Harney muttered under his breath.

They passed meadowlands bounded by high hills and sown to Indian corn. Sometimes in front of a bamboo hut they saw a bareheaded native woman, usually with a naked pickaninny astride her hips. Sometimes they saw dogs, pigs, ducks, and children wallowing together in a garbage-littered yard. Then the land seemed to drop away, and far below, half-hidden by trees and underbrush, a turbulent mountain river rushed toward the Pacific. The cars crawled up huge basaltic cliffs, wound through dense forests, and, suddenly descending, crossed broad savannas and swamps again, cutting through a spear of Mount Ancon to

reach the Pacific at Playa Prieta, the northern suburb of the City of Panama.

Father DeSmet would have liked to have wandered inside the granite, grass-grown walls and along the narrow, tortuous, cobbled lanes. He would have liked to have knelt before the golden altar of San José, said to have been miraculously saved when Morgan the buccaneer burned the city. But there was time for none of these things. Tugs and lighters already were waiting along the wharfs to carry travelers and baggage to their vessel which lay anchored in the bay.

## 3

On the morning of October 29th, 1858, Colonel George Wright, Commandant of Fort Vancouver, ordered his servant to put a fresh pine log on the drawing-room hearth. The chill wind that all night had driven the red oak leaves over the ground had also bitten through the walls of the colonel's office. He therefore preferred to receive General Harney and the priest in his drawing-room. Nothing in the appearance of the room indicated that it had once belonged to Dr. John McLoughlin of Hudson's Bay Company. No books, no piano, no bowl of roses modified the austerity of its oppressive oak furniture and bear rugs. But Colonel Wright was not thinking of Dr. McLoughlin or Hudson's Bay Company. He was awaiting the general's arrival with a good deal of the self-complacency that a military officer feels when he can report a successful campaign to his superior.

On the other hand, as the general and Father DeSmet walked up the long approach to the colonel's residence, the priest was thinking of his dead friend, the one-time, white-haired King of the Northwest. It seemed incredible that Fort Vancouver could have changed so completely during the ten years that it had been occupied by the United States troops. The half-breed children who once played in its streets were gone. No gaudily dressed squaws sat on their shanty stoops or chatted with the Hawaiian girls as they went for water. Father DeSmet knew what had happened. With the gold-madness in their eyes, the laughing, song-loving Creoles had long ago taken the trail to California;



and American squatters, with less music and more determination in their hearts, had planted their apple orchards, sown their barley and wheat, and laid out their town sites all the way from the west slope of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

As they drew near the stockade, the priest half-expected to see the white-haired fur king ride out on his chestnut stallion. For the first time he thought of Dr. McLoughlin's life as parallel to his own. Just as he had dreamed of a new civilization among the Rocky Mountain missions, the fur trader had dreamed of one at Fort Vancouver; and all their efforts had come to naught. Hudson's Bay Company hadn't wanted McLoughlin. He was too friendly with the Americans. As for the priest's own work—well, most of the missions were abandoned. Yet the fur trader's death had not been sad. After all his trials and disappointments he had remained firm in his adopted faith. "*Comment allez-vous?*" the physician had asked him on the last day, and he had replied, "*À Dieu.*" He had had a good death, Father DeSmet thought, and a good life when measured by standards not of this world.

Inside the colonel's residence the three men shook hands by the warmth of the pine log.

"I suppose you know that I have come with orders to relieve you of your command," General Harney said.

Colonel Wright smiled. "I received that information from General Clarke."

The men sat down.

"What is the present disposition of the troops?" Harney asked.

Father DeSmet, being hungry for news, regretted that the general plunged into his negotiations so abruptly. When their boat had left New York Harbor the bonfires that had hailed the laying of the Atlantic cable had scarcely died down; from the eastern seaboard to the Missouri River had fluttered newspapers reporting the great Lincoln-Douglas Debates; and moving more slowly, in an opposite direction, had come the persistent rumors of a second great gold-rush, not to California this time, but to Pike's Peak and the headwaters of the Arkansas River.

"One company of the fourth infantry is stationed here, and there are two at Fort Walla Walla, dragoons and artillery."

The general's scarred face showed such concern at this statement that the colonel to avoid laughing reached for his cigar-box. "We have Havanas even at Fort Vancouver," he remarked, offering them first to his superior and then to the priest.

Harney took a cigar and held it unlighted between his fingers. "Three companies of infantry, Colonel Wright! There has been some discrepancy. In Heaven's name what good can three companies of infantry do?"

"The other troops have been withdrawn at General Clarke's order."

Father DeSmet pushed his chair back from the fire. It was becoming uncomfortably warm.

Colonel Wright reached for a candle, lighted it at the hearth, and handed it to the general for his cigar. "General Harney, the war is over."

Harney was disappointed. "Well, I congratulate you, Colonel. That is good news indeed. Of course, it is only temporary. The Indians will rebel again and again until they are exterminated. What were your peace terms?"

"We fought two battles, one at the Four Lakes and one on Spokane Plains. Then through the help of Father Joset at the Coeur d'Alene mission we brought the tribes into council . . ."

"And the peace terms?" Harney asked again with impatience.

"The surrender of all property in the Indians' possession, as well as the men directly responsible for the attack on Steptoe. Each tribe also delivered one chief and four men with their families as hostages, and promised to molest no whites passing peaceably through the country."

"The last promise is worthless," Harney said. "But, of course, the stipulation was in order."

"Where are the hostages?" Father DeSmet asked.

"At Fort Walla Walla."

General Harney got up and stood with his back to the fire.

There was an unpleasant look in his heavy, scarred face. "You have been lenient, Colonel Wright, extremely lenient."

Father DeSmet thought of the thirteen Seminoles that Harney had hung in Florida. He was glad that Colonel Wright's campaign had ended before the general's arrival.

"And what about those Indians guilty of attacking Steptoe?"

"That was taken care of before the treaty was signed. Two were executed, Qualchew and Owhi. They've been trouble-makers for a long time. We caught one of Bolan's murderers and hung him."

Harney nodded. "I see. You caught one. And the others?"

Colonel Wright bit his lip. "We decided to forget them. It hardly seemed wise, General Harney, to go on killing Indians and white men indefinitely for the sake of revenge. The other murderers could not be identified."

"I trust, Colonel, that neither you nor the Indians suffered serious losses in the campaign."

"The greatest loss was in horses," the colonel said, laughing. "We took the whole herd belonging to the Palouses, eight hundred of them. They were wild and we couldn't manage to carry them along, so we spent two days slaughtering."

"I presume that was blood enough for any war," Harney said trenchantly.

"Yes, quite enough blood, General." Colonel Wright turned to the priest. "I hope, Father, that if you go into the interior you can avoid that battlefield. Since we could hardly bury eight hundred horses, the place at this time must be unsightly."

Father DeSmet was struck by the contrast between these two men. The general, with his head slightly lowered in a belligerent attitude, his legs wide apart, was having a hard time to keep his temper. The colonel had the firm self-confidence of a man who knows he has done his duty and will not apologize for it.

"Colonel Wright," the priest said earnestly. "I wish you would tell me the true story of this war. I worked among the Oregon Indians for a long time. All reports to the contrary, I

cannot believe that they would attack United States troops passing peaceably through their territory."

"I'm sorry, Father, but that's exactly what happened. There had been some trouble up at Colville, and the settlers asked for troops to be sent up there. Colonel Steptoe took his men and some Nez Percés and started north. Between Red Wolf Crossing and the Palouse River an Indian came and warned him the Spokanes would not let him cross their country."

"Between Red Wolf Crossing and the Palouse River!" Father DeSmet exclaimed. "Why, if Colonel Steptoe was going from Walla Walla to Colville, surely he would not go east to Red Wolf Crossing."

"A commander might very well lead his troops thirty or fifty miles off the trail without being cross-examined about it," General Harney snapped.

"He had very good reasons," Colonel Wright said. "The Palouses were thought to be in that neighborhood, and Steptoe hoped he might persuade them to surrender Bolan's murderers. Besides, it's a good place to cross. You know the Nez Percés keep canoes there."

"I didn't know that," Father DeSmet said. "I've been away twelve years. Didn't the Indians give him a chance to explain that he meant no harm?"

"They wouldn't believe him, Father. There's been talk that the Nez Percés incited the whole thing."

Leaning back in the chair, Father DeSmet fingered his crucifix thoughtfully. "Of course, they wouldn't believe him," he mused, as if talking to himself. "Why, Colonel Wright, put yourself in their position. Steptoe said they were going to Colville, but they did not take the Colville road. They continued advancing into the Spokane country. In such a case would you not have said, 'How can we believe that you are going to Colville when you are not traveling that way at all? If you were going to Colville, you would not have come here to where we are camped, very far from the road to Colville.' Certainly you would have said that. It was simply a misunderstanding."

"Father DeSmet," General Harney said, "it is useless to



rehash the causes of this war. It has been fought and won. The Indians are punished or half-punished. That is all anyone needs to know."

The Jesuit's face became more severe. The soft blue eyes hardened. "I beg your pardon, General Harney. I have spent half my life fighting for these Indians, and not you, nor Colonel Wright, nor the whole United States Army can dissuade me from continuing to fight for them."

The colonel looked at the priest with approval. "You are right, Father DeSmet. The United States Army owes a debt to the Jesuits that even you do not realize. Before the battle Father Joset rode ninety miles on horseback to warn Steptoe of the impending attack and to intercede with the Indians."

"God bless him!" Father DeSmet said.

General Harney tossed the stub of his cigar into the fire. "Any bunch of savages, no matter how stupid they are, would know that an army planning to attack would carry something better than musketoons."

"The men had two mounted howitzers with them," Wright put in.

Father DeSmet felt discouraged. If the commanders of the United States Army could not see this problem from the standpoint of the natives, there would be no hope for the Indians. He leaned forward to make one more attempt. "You can understand, can't you, General, that the Indians are terrified. Treaties have been made to remove them from their land. At any moment they may be put into effect. The white settlers have been invading their country like a horde of locusts. Undoubtedly many of those who would have remained peaceful were persuaded by false rumors. They are not stupid, General. You know, and I know, that their fears are justified, that their prophecies are true."

"And what are we expected to do?" General Harney asked. "Does that justify their depredations?"

"No, it only explains them. If I go into the mountains, I expect to ask the Indians for many things on behalf of your people here. I am asking you for only one thing on behalf of the

Indians. I ask that you try to understand the real cause for depredations such as these, and that you be merciful to this condemned race, even as God has been merciful to you."

The two army officers looked at one another in embarrassed silence. Then Harney's confidence returned. "Father DeSmet, I brought you with me as chaplain because I know your influence with the natives and I respect it. I give you my word that we shall do our best."

"Thank you," Father DeSmet said. "This is a sorry business, this slaughtering of one race for the security of another. Not one of us can prevent it, but we can remember that even savages are men."

Colonel Wright turned to the priest. "You might be interested to know that on the first day the Indians surrounded Colonel Steptoe's men they sent a messenger advising him that they would not attack because it was Sunday, but that he should expect battle the following morning."

"They are good Christians," Father DeSmet said simply. "What is the position of the Flatheads?"

"Peaceful, still boasting that they have never shed a drop of white men's blood."

General Harney sat down and sighed. His anger was gone. Father DeSmet thought that he moved a little wearily, as if he had been defeated in a battle quite different from those to which he was accustomed. "The conclusion of this war does not end your services as chaplain," he said to the priest. "How long has it been since you visited the mountain tribes?"

"Twelve years, General."

"That's a long time. Do you think they will remember you?"

"They never forget. Many of my old friends perhaps are dead, but those still living will remember."

"It will be your duty, Father DeSmet, to visit as many tribes as you can between Fort Vancouver and the Bitter Root Valley. Tell them on behalf of the United States Government that this peace is our will and God's. Tell them that their future removal to the reservations, if and when it takes place, is also God's will, and . . ."

"General Harney, does the Lord speak to me through the United States Army?"

The general flushed. "Forgive me. We military men are bull-headed, but that makes good fighters. Do what you can, Father."

Colonel Wright left the room and came back bringing a decanter of wine and glasses. He served the general first. When the priest reached for his glass, the colonel noticed that his hand trembled. "He is an old man," the colonel thought, "and he cannot save his people. He can only bind up the wounds."

For a while the men sipped their wine in silence. Outside the wind blew harder. Flurries of red and yellow leaves whirled against the windowpane. Clouds blew over the sun so that the room was darkened and the hearthfire and the warmth of the wine became more welcome.

General Harney began asking the colonel for news. Had the bill for a transcontinental telegraph been shelved? Were the Mormons making any more trouble? Did Colonel Wright think this gawky Abe Lincoln with the nasal voice and ill-fitting clothes would defeat Stephen A. Douglas in the Illinois election? The colonel did not know, but the man's popularity seemed to be increasing.

"They say he has a manner of touching the human heart with his words," Wright said, "so that when you listen to him you don't think about slave-labor or squatters' sovereignty, but you think of Jesus Christ and the human soul. The Little Giant has a keen mind too, but who knows where his heart lies?"

General Harney frowned. "That log-cabin boy had better go slow," he said. "They'll be calling him an abolitionist, and if they do, he's done for."

Father DeSmet's face was toward the fire. His thin, gray hair lay limply across his shoulders. In spite of his massive weight, he seemed singularly pathetic. "Everyone's hunting salvation," he said. "The emigrants to California think they can find it in gold. Both Lincoln and Douglas dream it lies in freedom, only Douglas wants freedom for the territories, and I don't think there's much doubt that Lincoln wants freedom for the slaves."

"It's a pretty important thing," Harney said. "But freedom won't make a man out of a mule."

"Yes, it's a good thing, but good only in moderation," the priest answered, "like everything else. Besides, it has little to do with a man's salvation."

Colonel Wright was surprised. "But, Father DeSmet, you'll admit, won't you, that the slave question is a vital one, not only from an economic, but from a Christian standpoint?"

"I don't think it's a legal problem, Colonel."

"Neither do I," Harney said. "But you've got to have laws just the same. A Nigger may not have sense enough to know he's better off as a slave, and then the law comes in and works for his own good."

DeSmet shook his head. "No, it's the one way you can't keep him in bonds, and the one way you can't set him free. Pass all the laws you want to and try to enforce them. Yet if the black man's bondage rests on law alone, he'll be free. If his freedom, on the other hand, is merely a matter of law, he'll be a slave forever."

"Well, what would you do?" Harney asked.

"I wouldn't put the emphasis on law but on human will." The priest studied the fire thoughtfully. Two pine twigs, all aglow, lay across one another in the form of a burning crucifix. "When northern industrialists are no longer money-making machines, but men; when southern planters have learned to measure the value of a human being above that of their cotton fields; when the poor slaves learn that freedom is a spiritual and not a physical condition, then there will be no slave problem."

Colonel Wright laughed. "That's the millennium, Father. You'll agree that meanwhile we've got to be practical."

"It's not as impractical as you think, Colonel. The Missouri Compromise was a law and it didn't solve anything. The Dred Scott Decision, intended to close an issue, merely opened one. Consider it a philosophical theory, if you wish, but I think it's been pretty well proven by experience that progress is spiritual."



"Let's look at it from the side of the abolitionists," Wright suggested. "Won't you agree that the spiritual progress of the slave would begin with his physical freedom?"

"I doubt it. It's my guess, Colonel Wright, that if the Negro is ever freed, he is going to suffer a new kind of slavery, assuming that civilization is then the thing it is today. Now he is enduring physical humiliation. Later it will be a humiliation of the spirit. Who will hire him for the same wages the white man gets? You've already passed a law barring free Negroes from Oregon. Other territories and states have done the same. Where will he go? How will he live? This nation of ours, so nobly based on the principle of liberty, is exterminating the Indian west of the Missouri, and east of the Missouri it is threatening to push the Negro into the gutter."

"I think it's a problem we won't have to face," Colonel Wright said, getting up to light the candelabra.

It was growing dark outside. There was no clock in the room, and Father DeSmet wondered whether nightfall had come or a storm was brewing. "I must go," he said. "I believe our business has been transacted and I have some old friends to see before I leave Vancouver."

Harney also rose. "You will leave tomorrow, Father DeSmet?"

"Yes, in the morning, and I will return with my report in the spring."

The three men walked to the door.

Father DeSmet turned around. "There is one more thing, General Harney. When I get to Fort Walla Walla I should like to take your hostages back to the mountains with me."

"That is impossible," Harney said, amazed. "It is a matter of discipline. The treaty was extremely lenient."

"How long do you intend to keep them?" the priest asked.

The general folded his arms and thought a moment. "I would suggest you tell the Indians that when they have proven themselves peaceably inclined, that is, when they have lived up to the terms of the treaty, say for six months or more, they may expect the hostages to be returned."

"The Northwest is not free from smallpox, General Harney. Furthermore, the Indians are not used to confinement. If any of them should die, it would be hard to explain. You know the natives attribute such deaths to poisoning."

"I am willing to take that chance."

The priest looked searchingly at the general's face, but he could discern no warmth. "The success of my journey will depend to a great extent upon the army's co-operation. I need evidence for whatever assurances I give them of the government's intentions. The present disposition of the natives is the result of bitter experience."

"The treaty which Colonel Wright negotiated is sufficient." Harney had once more lowered his head and spread his legs apart. It was the old attitude whose meaning Father DeSmet knew so well.

"General Harney, when the Indians delivered their hostages in accordance with Colonel Wright's request, they did so to show their good faith in us. Now, let us return their hostages to show our good faith in them."

"I am sorry. You are making an impossible demand."

Father DeSmet shrugged his shoulders. "In that event, I tender my resignation."

General Harney's face stiffened. "Father DeSmet, you reprimanded me this afternoon for declaring God's will. At least have the grace to let me declare the will of the United States."

"I have no other choice, but in that case I cannot be your tool. If I return to the mountains without the hostages, my duties will be merely clerical."

The officer needed Father DeSmet's help, and he too knew that a smallpox plague might strike at the Walla Walla prison, enkindling a second war. "I'll make a compromise with you," he said, feeling driven to the wall. "Colonel Morris is stationed at Fort Walla Walla. If the behavior of the hostages during their confinement has been good, I will give him authority for their release. If they have been stubborn and rebellious, I will ask that he withhold it and that you fulfill your mission in accordance with our original agreement."

"Thank you," Father DeSmet said. "That is quite satisfactory."

"Colonel Wright will have the papers ready tomorrow morning."

As the door closed behind the missionary, the officers looked at one another in silence.

"Goddamn it, Colonel. Did you ever hear of a general taking orders from his chaplain?"

Colonel Wright smiled. "I think, General Harney, that you exaggerate Father DeSmet's influence."

#### 4

The wild fowl and game that had once found shelter on the desiccate, treeless plains between Snake River and the mountains had become scant. Only occasionally a grouse or prairie chicken, lucky to have escaped the white hunter's shot, rose out of the shoulder-high sage. Only occasionally, terrified feet scuffled among dry grasses at the base of some gaunt outcropping of volcanic rock. The long, wind-driven rains, the sunshine, the seasonal birth of prairie weeds had been powerless to bring the dead to life. To Father DeSmet, the sterile land with its hushed absence of birds and its waterless gulches seemed symbolic of death, the death of all that he had dreamed to build in Oregon.

For the first time the priest's advancing years encumbered him. His body grew sore from the constant rubbing of the saddle; his feet ached in the stirrups. He had difficulty in keeping pace with the Coeur d'Alenes. After the cheerless prison of Fort Walla Walla the cold November air was wine in their blood. They would race their ponies over the rolling prairie as madly as if they were chasing buffalo, suddenly whirl about, and come galloping back like mischievous children. Father DeSmet had not the heart to restrain them. "Let them feast on their freedom," he thought, knowing himself the pleasant feel of a pony's muscles against the rider's legs, knowing too how the captives longed for the camp smell and the camp food and their own people.

However, in spite of his companions' exultation, the priest felt as if the blood had been drained from his body. He had known black hours in the past, but they had always been shot with the gold of a future hope. Now he had no illusions about his destination. Ten years ago there had been five Jesuit missions in the Oregon country. Now only two were left, Father Joset's among the Coeur d'Alenes and the mission of the Kalispels; and Father DeSmet was no longer a part of these. Lack of funds had made it necessary to transfer the missions from St. Louis to the European Province of Turin. Father Mengarini had been moved to California and Father Point to upper Canada. As for himself, after twelve years he was returning as a guest, almost as a stranger, returning as an ambassador of a government which had broken faith a dozen times and would continue to break faith, he feared, until the ultimate extermination of its victims. Vaguely the priest wondered how he would be received by these hopeless creatures, huddled together in despair, surrounded on all sides by enemies, and constantly beset by the terror of their impending removal to a new, less fertile land. "It will not be easy," he said to himself. "The color of my skin makes me guilty in their eyes. Because of it, I carry the burden of broken promises and blood. Because of it, a silence will lie between us which only God's mercy can destroy."

The solitude of a treeless desert was poor medicine for such thoughts. Moments came when Father DeSmet longed to throw himself from his horse and lie face down on the hard earth and cry out to Heaven as Christ had cried from the cross. But the Coeur d'Alenes noticed only that the priest sat somewhat rigidly in the saddle and that his deep-lined face was stern.

"Father," one of them said, "you lived in the mountains and were gay. In the white city you became an old man."

"No, Texaidek," the priest answered gently. "It is not the city that has made me old, but the years."

The Indian shook his head sadly. "You live far away. We do not see you. But if you should die, it would be bad for us."

"It is bad for you already, Texaidek. There is no hope save in your prayers and mine."



For three days they rode across the plain, making their campfires out of dry brush, telling stories at night to keep the haunting fear away. Then they ascended a high mountain vaulted with gigantic cedars, where the jays showered imprecations on their heads and the fragrance of evergreens was as sweet as incense at an altar-rail. Shortly after sunset, on November 18th, they knelt in prayer on the shores of Coeur d'Alene Lake. The water was dark and beautiful, as undisturbed as it had been a hundred years before. Something of its peace entered into the missionary's heart, reviving a thin, frail hope as insubstantial as a milkweed seed, a hope born suddenly from the willing spirit and denied as suddenly by the discerning mind.

They built their fire at the shore. After night had advanced, obliterating the line between the cedars rooted in rock and those that quivered in the water, they saw the light of another fire not far off.

"A camp!" Texaidek cried out.

At once tents were struck, horses untied, and the party, carrying pine torches to light its way, followed a narrow path that wound among the trees, along the lake, and down to the glowing fire where a number of Coeur d'Alenes had pitched their temporary lodges.

It was a strange meeting between those Indians and their hostages who had so unexpectedly returned. No one shouted with joy, no one rushed forward with outstretched arms. The Coeur d'Alenes stood looking at one another as members of a family stand looking into each other's eyes across the death-bed. Tears rolled down the bronze, wind-bitten cheeks, and the words waiting to be spoken lay caught in the throat. "No, there is no hope," Father DeSmet thought. "They know it even better than I."

A boy, whose body and face were young enough, but whose eyes were as cynical as those of his elders, offered himself as runner to the mission, which was still forty miles away. "I tell our people you are free, that the big Blackrobe has come back. Stay here tomorrow, Father, the hoofs of your horse are worn down. I send a boat for you."

By morning the wind had died, but a thick, wet snow was falling, whitening the air and melting on the ground. The evergreens dripped with it. The shore had become a desolate slough. The lake lay like molten lead and darkness enfolded the gloomy mountain-crests. Huddled in their robes, the Coeur d'Alenes sat together in a single tepee, smoking, chewing dry stumps of pemmican, and listening to the priest.

"You have been in a bad war," Father DeSmet said, "killing the white men, and the white men have killed some of your people. What are you going to do now?"

It was dark in the tepee, so that the brown faces were indistinct. Yet the light from the door-flap as it fell across the priest's furrowed face made his gray hair almost white. The darkness inside and the cold wet gloom without seemed like a shroud binding the hearts of the Indians together.

"We were afraid," a voice said. "They are going to send us away from the land that gives us food, from the hills that hold our fathers' bones."

"Do you think it will help to kill them?" the priest asked. "Do you know how many white men there are? There are so many they could wear down the mountains in crossing them."

"*Ai*, there are too many for us," the voice said again. "Even so, it is better to die with a bullet in the breast. It is better for us all to die and let it be the end."

"The white men were not going to kill you," Father DeSmet explained. "They told you they were going to Fort Colville."

The Indians moved, shifting their blankets. Then a young voice broke in. "They lied to us. They were riding toward the sunrise. Is Fort Colville over there?"

"They wanted the Nez Percés' canoes to cross the river."

"They did not tell us that. Besides, we do not know what things they say are lies and what are truth. They shift like the winds." The young voice was high-pitched and excited.

"Hush, Teetlesee!" This time a woman spoke. "You are a young buffalo calf. Let your elders answer."

"Let him talk," Father DeSmet said. "It is the young who must bear these burdens when you are gone."

"Father, the old men can keep peace. They have gotten their sons. They will soon die. We who are beardless, where will we be when the tenth spring has come?"

"No one will sell us guns," another complained. "They plan to slaughter us all."

Father DeSmet raised his hand for silence. "Do not talk to me of their slaughtering you. Remember, it was the Coeur d'Alenes who fired the first shot. Even if you were afraid, even if you thought they meant to fight, couldn't you have waited until you knew? Then the guilt would not have been yours."

The long silence that followed was broken only by the sound of wet, slushy snow pelting the sand outside.

An old man in the back of the tepee stood up, with his hands folded across his chest. His voice was thin and cracked. "I am old. I have lived a long time. I have seen my people strong. Today I see them weak. Father, what is the end? You tell us not to fight. Have you felt fear in your heart? Have you felt hate like a bear clawing you? You do not think then; you strike out."

"And when you do, you are crushed," Father DeSmet said.

"They are killing our game."

As the priest sat by the door of the tepee, facing the dark, indistinct faces before him, he felt the utter despair of his task. He could offer the Indians no real hope. All he could preach to them was forbearance. "Do you think I am a good man?" he asked.

"We love you, Father, as we love our own people," the old man answered.

"Do you believe that what I say is true?"

"You have told us no lies."

"Do you think there is only one good man among the whites?"

"No, there are others," one admitted.

The priest sighed wearily. "Yes, there are other good men among my people. The white men are like Indians, some are

good and some are bad. Some want to help you, and some want only to help themselves. You cannot fight against the white people, because there are too many of them. If you had not made peace on the Spokane plains, they would have killed every one of you. Since there is no hope in war, tell me, is it not better to have faith and to believe that the troops were going to Colville, as their commander said they were, and that the peace they have made will be a lasting peace? Is it not better to put your trust in that?"

The old man was still standing in the back of the tepee, with his arms folded and his face lifted proudly. "Father, would you have us like women, when our lands are taken from us and our children starved and our horses driven off?"

"It is that or death," the priest replied, and his heart shrank as he spoke the terrible words.

"Death is better."

"There was One who lived long ago, who was greater than any of us," Father DeSmet said, lowering his voice. "His enemies spat upon Him and struck Him and tore off His clothes and nailed Him on a cross. He carried no weapon; He spoke no word of hate. He cried out to God, and God came and took Him to a better world than this one. You know the story. I have told it to you before. It is a hard thing to do, this keeping of your arrows in the quiver, when you are strong and can strike back and kill proudly. But now you cannot strike back. You have no strength. What you do have is greater than strength and victory and lands and food. It is God's love."

Father DeSmet could not tell from the motionless faces in front of him whether his words had been understood. He knew it was difficult for a people to whom war is as natural as the buffalo chase to understand the Christian philosophy, and above all, difficult now in this moment of bitterness. "I am going to your people when the boat comes. You will stay here. When I see your chiefs, I must ask them for a message to the white men. I do not know what they will say. I should like to say to them, 'I met some of your people at the lake; they do not want war, but peace.' Can I tell them that?"



The old man lifted his hand. "Tell them, Father, that so long as the white men keep their promise of peace, we do not want to kill. Our chiefs have signed a treaty. The Coeur d'Alenes keep their word."

## 5

Toward noon a boat was sighted far down the lake, a small, blurred spot of darkness behind the falling rain and snow.

"Father, someone comes for you," Texaidek said.

Father DeSmet drew his buffalo robe over his cassock and went to the lake shore to watch the canoe. The desolate gloom of the day quieted him. Standing in the rain, he felt an inner calm, a resignation that gave him courage.

Texaidek stood at his side, his sharp eyes studying the boat as it neared. "It is a Blackrobe," he said. "It is Father Gazzoli."

Later, when the Indian waded into the lake and pulled the canoe onto the sand, with light, quick steps a priest jumped out. He was scarcely more than a boy, tall and thin, with the delicate features of a well-born Italian.

"*Dio mio!*" he cried, kneeling to receive the older man's blessing.

Father DeSmet lifted him up and kissed him on both cheeks. "Why didn't you send one of the Indians? You are wet and cold. Come inside."

"Send one of the Indians! *Santa Maria*, I have prayed the good Lord for this moment. Do you think rain chills the heart?"

Inside Father DeSmet's tent the Italian sat bundled in blankets, while the Coeur d'Alenes dried his clothing at their fire.

"You must remain in these mountains, Padre," he said. "The Indians talk about it. They say, 'When the big Blackrobe comes back, we will have no more trouble with the white men.'"

"I wish that were true," DeSmet answered. "Tell me, Father Gazzoli, how do the Indians feel?"

The Italian's black eyes flashed and his fine red mouth quivered at the corners. "Padre, once when I was a small chap my father and I were riding out of Rome. It was a fine spring morning. The Campagna was all in bloom, except where the hay-fields had been cut, and there were purple clouds over the slopes

of Tivoli. My father, who had an artist's sensitiveness to beauty, said, 'Gregory, do you know what makes the land so lovely?' I told him it was the month of May. He laughed and patted me on the head, saying, 'No, it is God and the angels. You cannot see them, but the air is full of angels.' I believed him, and as our horses trotted gaily over the road, it seemed that I could catch a glimpse of shimmering wings in the wind that rustled among the flowers. When we had reached the village where my father had business, he left me alone in the carriage. A peasant was leading his donkey down the street. Suddenly the donkey stopped. The peasant was the biggest man I had ever seen. He had wide, humped shoulders and a heavy jowl. He shouted at the ass furiously, telling it to move on, but the creature did not budge. Then he began kicking it, and when that proved futile, he went to the gutter and found a board with nails driven through one end. Shouting out blasphemies, he started to beat the ass with that board. The nails tore the poor beast's flesh, and blood ran down its flanks and from its nostrils. The sight of blood seemed to make the man crazy, and he kept on pounding the donkey as if all the devils of hell had entered into him. I began to get sick and wanted to vomit. Then my father came back. He saw what was happening. My father was a good man, Padre. With his horsewhip he struck the peasant across the face, leaving a big blue welt. Then he bounded into the carriage and we drove off. Although it was still spring and the flowers were in blossom, I felt that my father had lied. I knew there were no angels, because of what I had seen. Well, that is a long story, Padre, but I think the Indians feel that way. They too are children. For them the problem of evil is drawn on life's canvas with coarse, broad strokes. They recognize the colors, but they do not see the design. They dream that when you come everything will be set right again."

"And I can offer them nothing," Father DeSmet said gloomily.

"No, Padre, you can do much. They love you and you have God's grace."

Winter set in early. Day after day, shaking the snow from their shoulders, the Indians knelt before the altar in the Coeur d'Alene mission church. The beautiful statues of the Holy Virgin and St. John, which one of the Jesuits had sculptured with his own hands, looked down upon them in serene silence. The cold, bitter snow outside could not harm the painted red rose which the Mother of God sheltered against her heart. As if emblematic of Heaven's never-dying protection, its petals remained untouched by time or weather. After the benediction had been spoken and the tapers snuffed, St. John, with his hand stretched out, and Mary, clutching the rose, seemed to wait with everlasting patience for the candles to be relighted, for the tabernacle to be opened again, and for the dove that is the Holy Spirit to descend once more.

The snow deepened until the fenceposts around the tilled fields were hidden, and the earth-lodges made only a white hump on the ground.

Father DeSmet found it good to be living here with the Indians once more, good to see the trust in their eyes, good to stand with Fathers Joset and Gazzoli, watching the workmen in the carpenter and blacksmith shops, and in the bakery. The Coeur d'Alenes labored and prayed and appeared to be at peace; and now it seemed easier for the missionary to believe that they would always be so than to think of the impending trouble. He began to wonder if perhaps he had not been too gloomy, anticipating a doom that would never come. Would it not be possible to persuade the government to cede these mountain valleys to the natives and to let them stay here to raise their crops and plant their vineyards? He thought of Swiss mountaineers tending their goats on the high slopes of the Alps. Very far those simple men lived from the world of Berne and Zurich and Basel, from the porcelain factories and silk mills and ribbon looms. Might not the Indians live unmolested and removed even as they?

"You cannot go to the Bitter Root Valley until spring,"

Father Joset had said, and DeSmet, measuring the snow's depth by the cedar trees, knew that he was right. Yet often in late afternoon he would stand by the window of the log building where the priests lived and, looking out over those white snow-fields, broken in the distance by a barrier of evergreens, he would wonder about the Flatheads. He longed to see them more than any people in the world. They above all the other tribes in the Northwest were his children. Now they had no mission, no priest, no one to guide them. Yet when the Coeur d'Alenes had rushed into war, the Flatheads had been firm, keeping their weapons as clean and bloodless as the Archangel's sword on the tower of Saint Michel.

At midmorning of a sunlit February day, a murmur among the pine trees announced the first Chinook wind of the winter season. Before nightfall the roofs of the earth-lodges had shed their blankets and the fenceposts protruded from the snow. Father DeSmet spoke again of going into the Bitter Root Mountains, but the Coeur d'Alenes shook their heads. "No, it is too soon," they said. "Before the moon wanes our lodges will be white again." The next day an icy eastern gale slapped the face of the Chinook and drove it back. The sun failed. Hard white pellets whirled through the air, the church windows rattled during Mass, and the horses whinnied restlessly in their stalls. So Father DeSmet lingered for another month at the Sacred Heart Mission.

Although by the middle of March snow still covered the ground, where the Indians dug under it the first hairy shoots of the pasque flower appeared. "The Blackrobe can go now," the Coeur d'Alenes said. Indeed, on the day Father DeSmet and his guide rode eastward across the valley, the sky shone blue and the sunlit air was mild. Flocks of snow buntings swirled over the ground, scattering their tinkling music as they passed.

It was not easy riding through the snow. The horses floundered in drifts and became fatigued long before evening. The dazzling white ground tired the priest's eyes and made his head pain. Yet something in the oblique rays of the sun, something in the twittering of the chickadees reassured Father DeSmet.



Even the horses seemed aware of coming spring. Early in the day when they were fresh, they held their heads high, snorting with joy at the clear air. Their white breath curled out and was caught away by the breeze.

For several days the priest and his guide crossed the valley. Then almost at once they were in the mountains. As they drew nearer to the Flatheads, Father DeSmet felt his heart quicken. Here in the Bitter Roots even the fragrance of the conifers was sweeter. He had been away a long time. He wondered how many of his friends would be gone. He wondered whether it was true that they no longer wanted priests and whether they had forgotten their prayers. The mission buildings had been sold to a fur trader named John Owens, and the tribe was said to have deteriorated under his influence. Father Gazzoli had warned DeSmet that the trader disliked Jesuits, that he had a brutal tongue, and that he sold whisky freely. Yet as the priest rode deeper into the mountains, he felt more confident. If all his work among the Flatheads had been undone, if he found them singing their old war songs, enjoying their old lusts, they would still be his children. He would bring them back to God with a kind word, a story about the Holy Virgin, a prayer by the fire at night. After all, he knew that they were children and that the hearts of children are won easily, in little ways. He was sure that they needed him, for they stood now at the twilight of their history. A few more years and they could no longer roam over the old hunting grounds. So it had been with the Winnebagoes and the Potawatomis and the Foxes. So it would be with them.

These were the thoughts running through Father DeSmet's mind when his guide suddenly drew rein and pointed through the trees. They stood on the side of a mountain in a small clearing between the cedars above them and a thicket of unleaved aspen below. The guide was pointing where the aspens thinned to a snow-covered valley that cradled the winter village of the Flatheads.

The two men followed the path winding down the mountain. Sometimes trees hid the village from their view; again they

could catch a glimpse of blue smoke spirals and of men and women moving among the lodges. Then they saw below them a group of women gathering firewood.

In their caps of woven willow bark and grass and their brown hide dresses which repeated the colors of the landscape, these squaws seemed to Father DeSmet as much a part of the mountain as the trees. They were born of the earth; their bodies were bent toward the earth; and the bundles of firewood on their backs were as moss is to the rock and green leaves to the willow. One of the women moved more slowly than the others, the weight of her broad, oxlike body seeming to hinder her. Although Father DeSmet could not see her face, he knew from her manner that she was no longer young. As he stood watching the squaws, he heard a shrill, laughing scream behind him. He turned around and saw far over his head a bald eagle sweeping across the sky. The guide's pony had answered the call with a frightened whinny which made the squaws drop their wood and whirl about in terror. When the older woman saw the priest she cried out and ran toward him. Disregarding the path, she clambered up the mountain, pulling herself by the bare aspen branches, clawing the snow from the ground like an animal fleeing from danger. Her cap fell from her head, loosening her hair so that it tumbled over her shoulders and Father DeSmet saw her face.

"Mina-Yougha!" he cried, dismounting.

Panting from the exertion, she lay at his feet with her arms about his legs.

"Mina-Yougha, Mina-Yougha, get up!" the priest said, endeavoring to lift her.

She neither spoke nor moved, but breathing heavily, she lay prone in the snow. Father DeSmet knelt beside her, unclasped the arms, and lifted her face. He looked into it searchingly. The lips that had once been haughty showed only sorrow and bitterness now. Her eyes were those of a crippled animal. The years had washed over her face as water washes over a plowed field.

"Mina-Yougha, get up!"

The other women, who had come up by the path, stood to one side staring timidly.

Father DeSmet turned to his guide. "Go to the village with the women. I will come later."

When the others had gone, he tethered his horse to a tree and sat down beside Mina-Yougha.

The woman had drawn her knees up and had clasped her arms about them. She was looking over the valley and the earth-lodges to where the mountains rose against a blue sky. "You come too late," she said dully.

"Too late?" the priest asked. "It is not well with your people then?"

"Not well with us!" She laughed mirthlessly. "Father, we live like wolves. Forgive us. Tell us the prayers again."

"But you have not forgotten your prayers, Mina-Yougha?" the priest asked.

The woman reached inside her hide jacket and pulled out a cross which Father DeSmet had given her many years before. "No, I still wear this. I say the prayers, but it does no good. Soon we shall all be gone."

"And Ignace, does he not say the prayers still?"

Mina-Yougha stiffened and her face became like stone. "Ignace is dead."

"I am sorry," Father DeSmet said. "It is hard for you alone, but he is with God and will help you. There were a few I had faith in—you and your son and Ignace and Pilchimo . . ."

"Pilchimo is dead. A Blackfoot wears his scalp."

Father DeSmet looked at the ground and at the woman's brown hand that lay against it, gnarled and scabby like the twisted root of a tree when the soil has been blown away. Then he asked, "Is it fear of the white people that has done this?"

"Too many of them come. They sell whisky. They lie and cheat. My people see the wars go on and the Indians die. They know the land is theirs no longer. They say we shall be sent to a place where there is no game. Father, I do not care. If the earth has no animals, I eat roots. If it has no roots, I eat the

earth itself and die. But, Father, to go away and leave Ignace under the rock slides of these mountains, that I will not do."

"Ignace is not under the rock slides," Father DeSmet answered. "He is in your heart." He fingered his crucifix awhile and then added, "If your people have forgotten God, why did they not fight with the Coeur d'Alenes?"

"Many wanted to. But Francis Xavier and Victor, they would have let the arrows of their own people go through their breasts rather than see that. God has made them strong. They held the whole tribe back, but it is only for a while. More and more white men come. This peace cannot last always."

"I am here to do what I can," Father DeSmet said.

Mina-Yougha looked at the pale, troubled face. She put out her hand as if to touch it; then, remembering, drew back. "You are old," she murmured.

"It is only the body that grows old," Father DeSmet replied, getting up. "Let us go down to the village. You ride. I want to walk."

Trudging slowly, as if the rocks of age clung to his feet, the priest followed the path down to the valley. Mina-Yougha rode beside him on the pony. To the right of them huddled the lodges of the Flatheads, and to the left, the old mission buildings now occupied by the fur trader and the white squatters in his employ. The church was apparently in disuse, for tall weeds grew up to its door and the rains and snows of many seasons had washed the paint from it. The surrounding buildings were also dilapidated and weathered. A sign hung in front of the schoolhouse, but the missionary could not read it. The squatters, aware of the priest's approach, gathered in doorways and on stoops. None of them, however, came forward to interfere.

Mina-Yougha saw that Father DeSmet was looking toward the buildings. "It is God's will and our punishment," she said.

The priest caught the bitterness in her voice, but his own face was contorted with pain. He put his fingers to his throat and his nails dug deep into the flesh, leaving red marks. A low cry shook his body.



The Indian reached out to touch him. "Oh, Father, Father, why did you come back?"

"I do not know, Mina-Yougha. It was to be."

"It would be better if both of us were dead."

"No, no," the priest answered. "Our hope and our dream was God's gift, and this grief also comes from Him. Let us be thankful, Mina-Yougha, that He has deemed us strong enough to bear it."

Having come to a fork in the road, they turned toward the lodges of the Flatheads. Now the mission buildings lay behind them. Father DeSmet had endured no physical pain as intense as the suffering of this moment. Something seemed to be clawing at the vitals in his body. He wanted to shriek out in despair. His tears obliterated the Indian village. Blindly he stumbled down the road, not knowing what he would say to his old friends, not caring.

No one cried out at his approach. The Indians gathered about their lodges and stared at him with curiosity. As the mist in his eyes cleared, he noticed that nearly all the faces were strange.

An Indian, wearing a sack coat and holding a felt hat in his hand, staggered toward the priest. Mina-Yougha guided the pony between them in such a way as to crowd the man off the road. He was drunk.

Then the priest saw another man approach. His face was badly scarred, but after a century of separation Father DeSmet would have recognized the eyes. "Francis Xavier!" he cried.

The Indian started to kneel, but the priest lifted him and clasped him in his arms. Neither spoke for a moment. Then Father DeSmet raised his head and looked over the crowd of staring Indians. "Is there no one else?" he asked.

"Wistilpo and Insula and Victor are hunting. They will be back in a few days."

"Are no others left?" he asked desolately.

"None," Francis Xavier said.

"Where is Tchata?"

"Tchata died a long time ago."

Father DeSmet noticed that the streets of the village were littered with filth. A good many of the children were half-breeds. He started to ask about the white traders and settlers, but the uselessness of the question occurred to him. Here and there among the crowd he saw the flushed faces and blood-shot eyes of drunkards and the hard, cynical mouths of women who had made themselves harlots to white men.

"Come with me," Francis Xavier suggested. Like a child, the priest followed.

The girl with the cleft lip, whom Francis Xavier had married with such resignation years before, was cooking food over the lodge-fire. At the sight of the priest she screamed and fell to the floor, begging for a blessing.

"We pray for you every day," Francis explained, "and for the priests who have gone away."

"Perhaps there are some among the Flatheads who would like to confess," Father DeSmet said. "Then tomorrow we can celebrate Mass."

"In the church, Father?" Francis asked eagerly.

"It is our church no longer," the missionary said despairingly as he realized that the doors of the church which he and Father Mengarini had built were closed to him forever.

Mina-Yougha offered to go out and tell the tribe that the priest would hear confessions all that afternoon. When she returned, Father DeSmet read the answer in her face.

"Is it that no one will come, Mina-Yougha?"

"It is our wickedness that has done this," Francis said passionately. "We were eager to save ourselves, but we have failed by our children."

"You have done everything that you could, Francis, you and your wife and Mina-Yougha. It is my people who have failed."

"There are so few of us, let us have Mass tomorrow here in my lodge," Francis suggested.

Father DeSmet shook his head. "No, let us celebrate it under the trees. Maybe some of them will come."

Mina-Yougha sat down at the priest's feet. "Father, do

you remember my son, Keepele? How he carried the big book for you during Mass?"

"Yes, Mina-Yougha."

"He tried to take a white girl from one of the traders. They shot him. It was not his fault. They gave him the whisky." Her voice choked with a sob. "I pray for him, Father, but I do not know if it will do any good."

"The mercy of God is great."

Father DeSmet bowed his head so that the Indians could not see his face. But they saw his white, blue-veined hands clutch at the cassock and the cords of his neck thicken. For a long time he sat that way, his face hidden, his fingers clasping and unclasping the edge of his garment. No one dared to speak to him. Then at last in a hushed, broken voice he began, "Our Father, who art in Heaven . . ."; and the Indians joined him in the *Paternoster*.

## IX

### Sometimes the Lamp Burns at One End of the Room Only 1861-1862

#### I

Three years later when Father DeSmet lay ill in St. Louis, he remembered with nostalgia those days among the Flatheads. He had been heavy-hearted enough then, his back aching so under the cross that one night he had climbed alone to a gaunt crag overlooking the valley and had said aloud to the starlit sky, "Wind has stripped the last leaf. The tree is naked. Christ, have mercy on us!" Now as he lay in bed watching the late morning sunlight beat against the window, too warmly for May he thought, he felt ashamed of his earlier despair. "When the Lord increases our burdens He adds to our strength that we may bear them." How many times he had tried to comfort others with such counsel! Was he only now learning it himself, he wondered.

As long as he lay flat the pain in his head did not bother him, but whenever he sat up it began again, a dull, rhythmical thud accompanied by a wave of dizziness that made the window-sill bob up and down and the Holbein Madonna quiver on the wall. Then he would close his eyes and, trying hard to shut out the trample of feet, the shouting voices, and the rumble of carriage wheels in the street, with effort he would revive something of that hushed beauty of the Termonde cathedral in Belgium where he had said Mass only three months before. He had enjoyed this last trip to Europe more than the others. Always in the past, being eager to return to the Indians, he had begrudged the lost time. Now he had put away that part of his life as definitely as one pastes a picture into an old album and



closes the volume forever. So he had lingered in France and Belgium and Holland, knowing that the Rocky Mountain tribes no longer counted the months until his return. Again he thought of the European cathedrals. It was not only their beauty which sanctified them. Tradition and stability clung to their walls, as integral as lichen growing on rock. It seemed to Father DeSmet that America had neither of these virtues. All the way across the Atlantic he had carried the comfort of that Mass in Termonde. Then the spear-thrust news of the fall of Sumter had shattered it. As he rode westward from New York, at every railroad station the jostling men and women, the cries for war, the shrill-voiced newsboys, and the endless arguments of other passengers in the car had driven this thudding pain into his head. And two days ago the tragedy in St. Louis . . .

The door of his room opened and Brother John entered with a bowl of broth. Having shut the door behind him, he hesitated for a minute, disconcerted by the drawn face on the pillow. "Father, you must eat something," he said.

Father DeSmet smiled wistfully. "Brother John, you want me to be fat again."

"At least a little fatter," the lay brother replied, adjusting the pillow and placing a tray across the sick man's knees. "Does the noise bother you?"

"It would bother me less if these useless legs would take me to the window so I could see what's happening."

"There's nothing to see, Father. The secessionists are fleeing."

"Fleeing! From what?"

"The Union men were gathering this morning to 'clean out the secesh,' as the cook says. Father Coosemans had to make a sick call and the horse-cars were so full they wouldn't stop. They're all loaded with terrified people rushing to the station and docks." Brother John leaned against the window and looked out.

Father DeSmet put down his spoon and listened to the noise outside. Occasionally it lulled, then rose, sweeping into the room like a gust of wind. "How is Father Druyts?" he asked.

"Resting more easily."

Brother John made to leave, but Father DeSmet held him back. "It will be hard for the Father Provincial," he said, making conversation merely because he dreaded to be left alone.

Brother John sat down on the foot of the bed. Idly, with his big-boned hand, he drew an imaginary pattern on the coverlet. "He had a long talk with the archbishop yesterday."

Father DeSmet did not reply to this remark, knowing that Father Murphy had Union loyalties, which Archbishop Kenrick, being a Southern sympathizer, could not share. "Where is General Scott?" he asked suddenly.

"There's a rumor that he's fled the city."

"Fled!" Father DeSmet pushed the tray away. "I must get up. Mrs. Scott will want to see me."

"No, Father, you can't get up. She has other friends. If you don't take care of yourself, you'll be too ill to help when we need you."

The pain in the priest's head had begun throbbing again. He lay back on the pillow.

"It had to happen," Brother John said almost desperately. "He defied his own government. It's treason, it's wrong!"

DeSmet shook his head. "No, Brother, no. When two men or two groups of men strike at one another with hate in their eyes, it isn't a question of right and wrong. It's a question of two wrongs. That's the tragedy of this trouble."

"Father Druyts would put all the blame on the Unionists because they fired into the mob, but Father Gustav says . . ."

"Brother John, whatever happens to America, we can have no Civil War among the Jesuits. Our labor and our interests are not of this world, but of another. Each of us must keep his own counsel."

"It will be hard."

"Not with God's help."

"I wish Father Elet were alive," the lay brother said.

"Not for all the world do I wish that." As Father DeSmet spoke, the memory of Father Elet came to his mind, as he had been on that day ten years before when he had held his blood-

stained handkerchief across the desk and had said, "I think I shall not be here when you return." Yet Father DeSmet understood the lay brother's loneliness. One by one the old priests who had founded the university, who had shared their poverty with one another, and their dreams, had died. Not that the younger men were less faithful, less keen, or less courageous; but they no longer cherished a common past. "There is a loneliness in old age," the priest said aloud, "but when a man has more friends with God than in this world he understands better that death is a preferment."

Brother John sighed. "This is not the time for anyone to talk about death," he said firmly. "You above all, Father DeSmet, must not trouble yourself with such thoughts. May I pull the blind? If the room were darkened, you might sleep."

There was a knock at the door, and before Father DeSmet had a chance to answer, Father Murphy stood in the room. His silver-rimmed spectacles had slid down on his straight nose, and the hazel eyes that peered over them were alive with energy. Father DeSmet envied the quickness of his movements, for the vice-provincial was only a few years the missionary's junior.

"Well, Father, for once you may lie in bed without fretting. We're all shut in today on account of the mob. How do you feel?"

"I'm all right, Father," DeSmet answered, his eyes on Brother John who was disappearing through the door with the bed-tray.

The confused sounds outside subsided for a moment. Then carriage wheels clattered against the pavement. A man's voice yelled, "Goddamn rebels!"

"What the hell are you buttin' in for? Leave them alone!" another shouted.

A pistol shot took Father Murphy to the window. "Someone must have fired into the air," he said, returning to the bed.

"How many were killed Friday?" DeSmet asked.

"Fifteen."

The missionary looked at his superior. "I wonder, Father

Provincial, if it might not be well to find a house in Illinois where we could deposit whatever we wish to save."

Father Murphy pushed the spectacles higher on his nose. "Yes, I've had that in mind. We're making arrangements to send the Southern students to their homes. It seems incredible, Father Pierre, that a nation supposed to be dedicated to liberty and tolerance can be torn to pieces like this."

"I'm afraid tolerance and liberty are the heel of Achilles," DeSmet remarked grimly. "The Americans have been waging a war of ideas for the last fifty years. This is the result."

"This is neither liberty nor tolerance, this persecution which has continued for the last three days in St. Louis," Father Murphy said, perplexed by his colleague's statement.

"A democracy of ideas is like a democracy of men, Father Provincial. It is the temporary shifting of a pack of cards. The shuffling can't go on forever, and in the end one card is bound to be on top. Imagine a democratic religion, a Catholic Church with no hierarchy."

Father Murphy returned to the window and stood with his back to the sick man.

The few days that Father DeSmet had been lying in bed seemed to him an eternity. The Jesuits had been busy, and during his enforced solitude, the missionary had stored his thoughts in the crib of his brain. Now they came tumbling out. "In the United States, Father Provincial, there is not one truth which has not been denied. There is not a mystery which is not contradicted, not a principle which is not contested, not a duty which is not violated. People dispute on every point, on the government, the laws, the customs, the institutions. That in itself breeds a spirit of revolution. But what is far worse is this immense population of public preachers, teaching every possible kind of doctrine. The upper members of society are the victims of indifference, the lower classes are the dupes of ignorance. Here there is no homogeneity, no brotherhood of man. 'I'm right and you're wrong!' is what everyone shouts to his neighbor. Only now men have become discontented with shouting only."



Father Murphy did not turn around, but he said quietly as if addressing the street outside, "Yes, Europe had a long history of thralldom, and it ended in corruption, corruption even for the church." Drawing the blinds quickly, he seemed to shut his own thoughts out with the warm May sun. "You had better go to sleep, Father Pierre. There is nothing either of us can do."

## 2

Not until June was Father DeSmet able to be out again. All the students at St. Louis University had been sent home. The public schools had also closed their doors. The missionary walked east on St. Charles Street and then turned south to Pine. The muddy streets were deserted. He noticed that a good many of the houses were vacant and the windows of some shops had been boarded up. Even as far down as the warehouse district, cows were feeding on the grass which late rains followed by a hot sun had encouraged to spring up among the cobblestones of the street. Along the levee the steamboats stood idle, their dingy white hulls rotting in the summer heat. Since the river was blocked, all attempts to carry on normal traffic had been abandoned. The priest saw a rebel flag flying over the door of a dilapidated saloon.

He was hot and regretted his long walk to the levee. He had made few calls during the weeks of his convalescence because the bitterness of men and women troubled him. Besides, it was difficult in any group to maintain the silence which he as a Jesuit felt obliged to keep. Near one of the ships stood half a dozen dirty hogsheads. Exhausted by his walk, Father DeSmet sat down on one of them. The physical weariness that plagued him so continuously these days was always accompanied by a soul-sickness which he could not shake off. He was sick of the constant bickering between factions in the city, sick of attempts to force the Indians to join one side or the other, sick of talk that if Missouri seceded from the Union, St. Louis would secede from Missouri. Now, as he sat in the shade of the boats, watching the dark water at his feet, he thought of the history of his own little country, how Belgium had suffered succes-

sively under Spanish, Austrian, and French rule, how Protestants and Catholics had risen against one another even while the prayers were on their lips. So it had always been in Europe, so it would be here, he thought, the same time-old struggles and sufferings and rebellions. Father DeSmet no longer cherished any hope that the nation would be reunited, and he wondered what would happen to Oregon in the end, when the new nations were made.

A woman came and sat down beside him. "There ain't nobody on the streets, and I hope you don't mind my settin' here to rest my bones. I been walkin' all night."

Looking up in surprise, Father DeSmet saw a pink face under a cloud of yellow fuzz. Two pudgy hands, which were still pinker, toyed with the ribbons of a frayed bonnet.

The woman laughed in embarrassment. "I'm sorry," she said. "Comin' from behind I didn't know you was a priest."

"That's all right," Father DeSmet answered. "There is room enough for two."

With this encouragement, she let her bonnet fall to her shoulders and stared wearily into the lap of her crumpled, wine-colored dress.

As they sat together in silence, Father DeSmet felt a pang of regret tempered by amusement. "War," he said to himself, "that parts so many friends makes strange companions."

A gull wheeled over one of the steamboats and disappeared. In the opposite direction, the rebel flag hung motionless in the sunlight, a patch of defiant color against the somber buildings.

Gradually becoming more at ease, the woman began to swing her legs lazily against the hogshhead in the manner of a country girl perched on a fence. "Say," she said confidentially, "you don't know nobody, do you, that's goin' down South?"

"No, I don't," the priest answered, his sympathy aroused. "Is your home there?"

"Naw, but there ain't nothin' for a girl to do in this dead town. I heard the rebels are comin' into southern Missouri."

"You won't want to go down there. There will be fighting," Father DeSmet said.

"Mebbe, but I could get somethin' among the soldiers. Only I ain't got no way to get down."

Father DeSmet did not answer at once. He looked at his companion shrewdly to be certain that he had not misjudged her. Then he said, "There's more than one way for a girl to earn her living."

"I know, and I guess there's better ways than this." The woman's voice had no trace of sentimentality. "But it's hard to get into somethin' else. Besides, you know there's talk that they're goin' to burn St. Louis."

"I wouldn't worry about that. I think they will burn the Southern towns first."

For a while the heavy silence of the abandoned boats lay wedged between them. "What is your name?" the priest asked finally.

"Sarah."

"What kind of work can you do, Sarah, besides this?"

The woman swung her legs back and forth and contemplated the river as if considering. "I can cook all right. I used to cook for the men on pa's farm."

"Would you be willing to cook for room and board in a place where you would have to stay in nights?"

"That'd be all right," she said. "Do you think it's fun walkin' the streets?"

Father DeSmet liked her frankness. She wasn't young, but he thought there might still be a chance for her. Somewhat naïvely he wondered how old Mary Magdalene was before she first listened to Jesus. "If I asked them, the Sisters of Charity would give you some work."

The woman's lip curled enigmatically. "Oh," she said and began folding her skirt into little pleats across her knees. "Say, did you see that rebel flag back there? Somebody's goin' to get killed."

Father DeSmet nodded. "A great many people will get killed before this war's over, and thousands will wish they had been. Army life is pretty rough, you know, even rougher than the sort of thing that goes on along the water-front here."

"I guess that's so," she conceded thoughtfully. "Thanks a lot, but I don't think them nuns and me would get along."

"They are simple-hearted, charitable women," Father DeSmet said.

Sarah sat pleating her skirt slowly, deliberately, as if she tucked a thought away under each fold of the goods. Then she smoothed it out again. "Well, I can't set here all day. I got to be gettin' along." She put on her bonnet and stood up. "Thanks again for your offer. Let me know if I can ever do anything for you."

Father DeSmet smiled. "Thank you, Sarah. Perhaps you can sometime."

The woman laughed and went her way.

More than a year later, when the priest was riding to Washington, he remembered that incident. A heavy downpour of rain simplified the landscape beyond the car windows to alternate, blurred streaks of green and brown. The gas-lights in the train had burned since morning, but their white flames struggled uselessly against the drab day. The saturated air increased the stench of the rough, bearded soldiers, who, in spite of their begrimed faces and mud-covered uniforms, sprawled over every available seat, shouting out ribald stories and spitting tobacco juice into the aisle, with little consideration for the few civilians traveling with them.

"I got a furlough of ten days," one of them had said to Father DeSmet, as he bit off a quid of tobacco. "My God, a year ago I would have pawned my shoes for a chance like this, and now I'll be damned but I don't want it. What'll I say to my girl? She lives in the green hills of New Hampshire, and all she knows about war is a pretty flag flying in the sun and the sound of a brass band. I was at Rolla six months. Do you know the kind of a hell it is? We crawled through the mud like turtles, and when we got leave to go to town, we didn't go to no churches. D'ye think she'd understand that sort of thing?"

The soldier hadn't waited for any reply, but after he had gone Father DeSmet suddenly remembered Sarah's pink face and yellow hair. As he watched the rain streaming across the



windows, his conscience tormented him. When he had let Sarah walk away that June morning hadn't he contributed to just the sort of thing this soldier was talking about? He should have taken her to the Sisters of Charity. Yet at the time his solicitude had not been so great for her as for the nuns themselves who were worn out with labor and trouble already.

He had not seen Sarah again, and only a few months afterwards the deserted city had seethed with a new, miserable population that had poured in from the South. Warehouses, slave pens, homes, and every available building had been converted into prisons, hospitals, and shelters for refugees. Week after week he had tramped the streets, until the soles of his shoes had worn so thin that the mud fell from his feet when he undressed at night. Now in the horrible, confused ocean of his memory, only a few incidents floated to the surface with clarity. One was the picture of a raw-boned, pock-marked boy from the Kentucky mountains, who had lain dying of pneumonia at the Virginia Hotel, an old hostelry which was used as an asylum for freedmen and white refugees. He had found the boy lying on the floor of a filthy, littered room. He had assured Father DeSmet over and over that he hadn't done anything bad because he had never spoken one "cuss" word his whole life. Yet after the priest had explained all the ten commandments to him, he remembered that he had shot his best friend through the heart in a brawl over a tavern girl.

His mother, who had sat picking her teeth in a dark corner of the room, had chimed in, "Jim ain't done nothin' wrong in that. He'd had two brats by that girl and she was his all right."

Helplessly Father DeSmet had turned at last to leave, the old woman following him to pour forth a volley of complaints because a Negro had been allowed to occupy the adjoining room. They were good white folks from the Kentucky mountains, she had said, and they weren't accustomed to sharing quarters with "Niggers." Father DeSmet had stood in the doorway, looking first at the dirty bed-clothes on the unswept floor

and then at the woman's calico apron which had rotted to rags more from filth and neglect than from wear.

The Negro next door had received the priest politely, although with some distrust at first. His room had been well swept and was heated by an improvised stove which he had made from rubbish gathered along the levee. He had explained that every day he went out to hunt for work and that he begged for food at the back doors of restaurants. More than anything else he wanted to learn to read. He had a Bible which his master had given him long ago. If he kept it, he might learn to read some day, but he had heard that the boy next door was dying, and maybe it would give that boy some comfort to have a Bible. Would Father DeSmet take it to him? The priest had told him to keep his book and had promised to return the following week.

That same night on his way back to the university, he had met a company of refugee slaves. Although it was midwinter, the women wore only coarse cotton gowns and red bandannas wrapped about their heads; the men were little better off; and the whole group was trudging barefooted through slush and snow. The children's feet were badly frost-bitten and were bleeding. The women complained that they had met some Confederate soldiers on the road who had pulled off their shoes and told them to run like foxes, if they didn't want to get killed. The men had been sullen and afraid to talk. Father DeSmet had taken them back to the university for the night, and while the cook was serving them warm broth, the lay brothers had brought in basins of snow and thawed out the children's feet by the fire.

After a year and a half of such tragedies the war was still going on—Bull Run and Shiloh, the sinking of the Merrimac and the fall of New Orleans, and ambulances rumbling down the streets of Richmond, bringing in the wounded.

The priest looked out the car-window. The train had pulled into a station. Most of the Union soldiers had gone outside to stretch their legs awhile and to enjoy the cheers of the townspeople who had gathered on the platform and were waving American flags. The civilians stood shivering in the rain, and

notwithstanding their noisy gaiety, Father DeSmet thought that their faces looked unhappy, like the worried faces of the Coeur d'Alenes when they had talked about the white men coming.

The soldiers crowded into the train again and the cars lunged forward.

A short, square-jawed German, wearing the insignia of a corporal, sat down beside the priest. "Where are you going, Father?" he asked.

"Washington," the priest replied.

"You'll need hip-boots in that town," the corporal remarked, and stretching out one of his legs, he pointed to his mud-caked shoes. "See that. That's mud I got in Washington a year ago. You've got to dig it off with a butcher-knife."

Father DeSmet nodded. "I know. I've been in Washington before."

"It's worse now with the army going through all the time. Have you been transferred there?"

"No, I'm going on business."

"It's a bad time. They've got officers in the watch-towers and sentinels guarding the streets. The Confederates are going to attack. What sort of business?"

The missionary was somewhat taken aback by his inquisitor's bluntness, but the man seemed to be genuinely interested. "The government has been too busy with the war to pay its obligations to the Indians. I hope to collect some annuities due the Osages and Potawatomis."

"Yes, I know all about that," the corporal said grimly. "I'm from Minnesota."

"From Minnesota!" Father DeSmet exclaimed. "And you're in the Union Army?"

"It's funny, isn't it. My people are being wiped out by the Sioux, and I've got to go back to the Potomac and join my regiment to fight rebels. They'd better let the whole damn bunch of rebels go to hell and turn the army loose on the redskins."

"Have you just come from Minnesota?" Father DeSmet asked.

"You guessed it. I got shot in the arm at Bull Run and they sent me home to get well. My leave is up now."

"What part of Minnesota?"

"The worst. My folks have a farm near Yellow Medicine. A half-breed came and warned us, and we got away by hiding in the grass in the daytime and crawling through the brush by night. My God, Father, the savages have just about blotted out the southern part of the state. They told us at the Lower Agency that the white women begged their husbands to shoot them."

"The Santee Sioux are fighters," DeSmet said, "but even the best men fight when they are starving."

"That damn rotter Andy Myrick got what was coming to him all right, the loose-tongued fool!"

"Who's Myrick?" the priest asked.

"He was a trader up there. The Indians had come to ask for their money and complained they were starving. Myrick said afterwards, 'If they're hungry, let them eat grass for all I care.' And the Sioux found out. Some time later a bunch of farmers and their wives were running for all they were worth. One of the women fell over his body in a clump of trees, and his mouth was stuffed full of grass."

"The St. Louis papers claimed that two hundred whites were massacred the first day. Is that true?"

"They found that many bodies. There may have been more."

"The Sioux can make a long war if they want to," Father DeSmet said thoughtfully. "We don't want any trouble like that among the Osages."

The corporal's square jaw was stubborn. "Well, if it hadn't been the money, it would have been something else. They let the whites go into that country too soon. Everyone said the savages were shut up in their reservations and the land was as calm as Eden. My folks came from the old country and they didn't understand. They thought a reservation was like a prison, with high walls around it, and not just an imaginary line drawn in the minds of those damn fools at Washington. That's where



the Indians ought to be, shut up in some of those old castles on the Rhine, with a gang of sentries ready to stick bayonets in their ribs."

"They were starving," Father DeSmet said.

"They deserve to starve," the corporal retorted. "Nobody knows how long they've been living here, but what have they done? Not a damn thing but kill each other. I believe God does what's right. The redskins lost their claim to the land when they didn't cultivate it and live in peace together."

"Like the Americans?" In spite of the grimness of the conversation, there was a twinkle in the priest's blue eyes.

The corporal did not understand. "We all know the whites came here commanded by God and armed with His law," he continued. "When the Indians fight against them, they're fighting against God, and their extermination will be His will."

"That's interesting," Father DeSmet said dryly. "Is your wound healed now?"

"A little stiff, but I can pull a trigger again. I had plenty of chance to try it out this summer." He took out his pipe, filled it, and struck a match.

Father DeSmet felt that the conversation was getting nowhere. He lay back a moment, watching the rain. Then he drew his breviary from his pocket and began to read.

### 3

On the 17th of September, 1862, Pierre Jean DeSmet sat by the door of President Lincoln's reception room. Mud clung to his shoes and the hem of his cassock, for he had walked along those wide, unfinished avenues where the mud never seemed to dry and where the public buildings stood in an uncultivated, undrained slough. However, the other visitors who filled the waiting room were no less bedraggled. For the most part they were women who had come by stagecoach, railroad, and boat to beg favors for sons and relatives—women dressed in calicoes and silks, bareheaded and in feathered bonnets, young and old, but all of one age in their grief. Father DeSmet noticed that one of them, having been bespattered by a passing carriage, was

attempting to rub the spots from her taffeta skirt. Next to her, a slender young man was explaining that since his father had invented the iron-clad gunboat, the President would not dare to refuse him the appointment he desired. In a corner of the room an immaculate Negro stood erect, almost stiffly, behind a straight-backed chair, not venturing to sit down. Because he carried a Bible, the priest concluded that he was a colored preacher who had possibly come for no more than the honor of shaking Lincoln's hand.

The door of the President's office opened and a slight, pale-haired gentleman, dressed in a dark frock-coat and light trousers, walked through the room and disappeared into the hall, leaving a trail of cigar smoke behind him.

"That's Secretary Seward," someone whispered.

Several women fluttered to the doorway.

An attendant appeared and called Father DeSmet's name.

Rising from a long desk-table, which was cluttered with unopened mail, military commissions, papers, and a half-finished glass of milk, President Lincoln stepped forward to shake hands with the priest.

Father DeSmet was accustomed to dealing with coarse-faced fur traders, but this gawky, rugged man, who looked like a farmer dressed for Sunday meeting, had a different sort of coarseness. He reminded the priest of a horse he had once ridden in the Rocky Mountains, a horse with big knees, gaunt shoulder bones, and a neck like iron. He had been gentle enough, but once when Father DeSmet had tried to force the beast into a treacherous river, he had become obstinate. The half-breed who owned him had said later, "Give that horse his own way. He's wiser than any man who rides him. That's why he's stubborn."

"I'm always glad to see a Catholic clergyman," the President was saying. "I reckon you don't have a rebel son who wants to be released from prison, and that you aren't asking for a political job."

Father DeSmet laughed. "I'm from St. Louis. That should give you some misgivings."

Lincoln indicated a chair for the priest. "Yes, we've had the dickens of a time with your state. Back in Illinois I had a neighbor who owned a pigsty like Missouri. It was too small and the hogs kept trying to push each other out. I said to Stanton just the other day, 'The folks who live there get the jostling and all we have to do is listen to their grunts.'"

"In that case, I hope your neighbor had as good a swineherd for his hogs as General Halleck has been for us," the missionary said.

"I'm pleased to hear you say that," Lincoln remarked. "I was a bit worried when I heard he had put some ladies in jail for carrying rebel flags. But Halleck's a man to be relied on. I didn't think he'd disappoint me."

With interest the President studied the broad Flemish face of his caller. A pair of mild eyes tempered the severity of its care-worn lines, and the tangled gray hair that fell to the man's shoulders made him look almost Biblical, like David in his old age perhaps.

It had been noisy in the outer room, but in the quiet of the President's office Father DeSmet could hear a far-off thundering. "Is that a storm or cannons?" he asked.

"Cannons," Lincoln answered, and a hollow weariness echoed in his voice. Then he added with a trace of forced humor, "McClellan's kicking up his heels today."

"I called on both Secretary Smith and Mr. Dole this morning," Father DeSmet said.

"Then I reckon you're a missionary. What's the trouble now? I've got too many babies on my lap as it is."

Father DeSmet smiled. "I'm trying to keep one of them quiet. That's why I came."

The President noticed the glass of milk and reached for it. "I must have forgotten to finish my lunch," he said.

"The annuities for the Osages and Potawatomis are past due."

"The Osages. They're down on the border, aren't they? Dole has sent me a report about them."

"They're starving, President Lincoln."

Lincoln began going through his papers, hunting for the Indian commissioner's report. "They shouldn't be. That's good farm country down there. Aren't they cultivating it?"

"Cultivating it when they can. But last spring an epidemic of black measles struck the mission. The Indians thought their children had been given the disease by baptism, which didn't make it any easier for the priests. While the epidemic was raging, it was impossible to sow crops. So last summer the Osages took to the chase. But the buffalo have been depleted and driven away. Besides, after the hunt many of the Indians abandoned their farms and returned to the blanket. Last month we passed out corn, and they were so hungry they ate it raw. They keep begging for money and we've been putting them off, but we can't do it much longer."

"Didn't Dole promise you the money?"

"We need more than a promise, President Lincoln."

"The Minnesota massacre has brought the department a heap of trouble," Lincoln said. "I guess your Indians will have to be patient."

Only the rise and fall of the crucifix which Father DeSmet wore indicated that he was breathing more deeply. "Mr. Dole, I am sure, understands that if the annuities had been paid in Minnesota, there would have been no massacre."

President Lincoln had found the commissioner's report and was thumbing through its pages. "Some of my generals would disagree with you," he said. "There's Harney, for instance. He's a good man and an honest one. He'd say the payment of annuities was just one of a hundred causes that might start an uprising. He thinks the Indians are devils and wants to kill them off."

"Harney couldn't kill them off within six months. By that time they may be in the rebel army."

Lincoln looked up from the report. "Have the rebels been after them?"

"President Lincoln, you know that for more than a year southeastern Kansas has been full of rebel troops. They've even camped on the mission grounds. Last year the federal agent you



sent down there was afraid to travel the fifty miles between the mission and the Quapaw Agency without taking some priests for protection. When the settlers discovered he was there, they burned down the building."

Lincoln remembered the incident, but he had forgotten it occurred in the Osage country. He walked to the fireplace and stood with his back to it. After a pause he chuckled. "A Methodist preacher was in here yesterday. He knew just how to run the whole country. He said he had a dream and the Lord told him that McClellan should withdraw his troops from the Potomac and march down to Georgia. Maybe I ought to call him back and ask him what God wants done with the Indians."

In spite of the President's jest, Father DeSmet thought that, as he stood by the fire, his dark, black-bearded profile was singularly sad, like bare crags he had seen in the Rocky Mountains, which face the north winds and have no trees to lend them grace.

Whimsically Lincoln continued. "That preacher made me think of a young colt. I suppose if a colt looked over the fence at a dray-horse, he'd think he knew the feel of a harness. But I reckon once he got into a harness he'd find it a heap different. It's not just dragging the load. It's the bit too that bothers. Take the Indian commissioner, for instance—now the report Dole sent me last week is a bit in my mouth, and he knows more about Indians than I do."

"One doesn't need to know very much, sir, to know that when men are starving they turn into beasts. They go out and kill."

Lincoln sighed. "The Indians aren't the only people starving in this country. My good Father, do you realize that this city may be invaded before the end of the week? Every hospital now is filled with dying men. There are hundreds of stragglers in the streets. They too are starving. Only by the grace of God was McClellan able to gather the ragged, scattered army of the Potomac together again, in the forlorn hope of driving the enemy back into Virginia. There's not a man here whose life is safe. There's not a man or woman here who does not feel

driven to the wall to make a last thrust for life. And you come, in a time like this, telling me some Indians in Kansas want their money. Would you try to collect a debt from a man marooned in a treetop in a Mississippi flood?"

"President Lincoln, there was a great man once who at the moment of death remembered he owed his friend a cock. Does the United States think only of its own welfare?"

"God knows it doesn't," the President said, "God and the boys who are dying today. You've talked to Secretary Smith and you've seen Mr. Dole. There's nothing more you can do, Father. You had best go away. Go away from Washington before there's blood in our gutters."

Father DeSmet's hand slipped from the cross-bar of his crucifix down to the tip. "I will appreciate your seeing that Dole makes good his promise right now," he said firmly, "that the annuities are paid at once."

Lincoln shook his head. "I don't tell Stanton how to run the war, and I can't tell Caleb Smith how to run his department. I appointed him because I thought he'd do a good job."

"He is doing a good job," the priest agreed. "But Washington is fifteen hundred miles from the Indian country. The men here can't always see a crisis that far away."

"Maybe I should give Smith a pair of field-glasses," Lincoln suggested, chuckling again.

His mirth was not returned. The old fire had come into Father DeSmet's eyes. He stood up. "So far as the Indians are concerned, President Lincoln, the United States is a nation without honor. It has broken faith again and again. There is little of democracy in the manner in which the government has shifted the natives from one territory to another, to suit its own convenience. In my own experience the Potawatomis have been reduced to beggary and starvation. I attended the Fort Laramie Council ten years ago. The treaty the Indians signed at that time to guarantee emigrants the use of the Oregon Trail provided for an annual compensation of fifty thousand dollars for fifty years. You know that when the Senate ratified that treaty the fifty years were reduced to fifteen. The treaty negotiated with

the Flatheads in fifty-five was still unratified four years later at the time of the Coeur d'Alene War. Certain bands had taken no part in it. They lived from year to year not understanding the movements of the troops through their country and in constant terror lest they be forcibly removed from their homes. The annuities paid are so greatly reduced by charges against the accounts that there is practically nothing left. Now, because the government is fighting a so-called godly war for the liberation of the black man, it thinks it is justified in kicking the Indians from its heels as if they were a pack of dogs. In the end your children will suffer for this stupidity, as the nation today is suffering for an earlier one. I thank you for the time you have given me. Good day."

The priest was at the door before the President's voice made him turn.

"The charges you have made are bitter ones," Lincoln said.

"They are not charges against you, President Lincoln, but against the blundering ways of Congress and the Indian Department. The thing I am asking is not a great thing. It is only the payment of a just obligation. You who have the freedom of the Negro so much at heart, have you less consideration for these Indians?"

President Lincoln was standing behind his desk. He seemed taller than ever and more gaunt, as if a lonely tragedy had worn the flesh from his giant bones. "No one has hated this war more intensely than I," he said in a hoarse voice that seemed to tear the words from his heart. "It is not an easy thing to right the wrongs of a nation. Sometimes it seems that in trying to save the tree we have pulled it up by the roots. I have always thought slavery was a bad thing, not because I have a particular love for the Negro, but because, even as you, I believe in the brotherhood of man."

The priest felt that for the first time he had touched the spirit behind that craggy monument of flesh, and he was filled with pity. "May the Sacred Heart of Jesus grant you peace," he murmured.

The President sat down. For a moment he held his face in

his hands. Then he looked up, reached for a pad of paper, and began jotting some notes with the worn-off stub of a pencil. As he did so he said, "Sometimes the lamp burns at one end of the room only, and we don't realize that the other end is in darkness. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to see Secretary Smith tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning! Father DeSmet, that is impossible."

"President Lincoln, I promised that I would not leave Washington until I had a check for the annuities in my pocket."

"You play for pretty high stakes with the odds against you," Lincoln said.

"It was an emergency, sir. I tell you, the Indians are starving."

"Annuity checks are paid only to Indian agents. I'm sorry."

Father DeSmet took a wallet from his pocket and opened it. "I have a letter here from the agent at the Osage Mission, giving me authority to receive the check."

Lincoln smiled. "Is there anything you've forgotten to do, Father?"

"I think not."

"Then I guess there's no likelihood you'll forget to come back tomorrow after I've seen Caleb Smith. About eleven-thirty."

"God in His mercy will not forget," Father DeSmet said. "And I shall pray for you."

"Pray for this tortured country instead," Lincoln answered. As Father DeSmet opened the door to the outer office, the President called to him. "By the way, don't send any more Jesuit priests up here. I've always been able to handle horses better than mules."



## X

### They Are Indians Before God

1868

#### I

There were times in the dark war years that followed when it seemed to Father DeSmet that his old, worn-out body was dying with the dying nation. In the confusion of St. Louis, where refugees and wounded soldiers and freed Negroes and shouting politicians jostled one another all day; where women, throwing coats over their nightgowns, ran down the streets to catch the shrill newsboys; where a mirthless gaiety overflowed saloons and dance-halls along the levee; where dilapidated carriages brought ladies in patched taffetas to the cathedral to count the dead on their rosary beads—in that St. Louis Father DeSmet sat behind his desk as Procurator of the Province of Missouri and handled the affairs of the Jesuits as he had done so many years before.

Day after day the black cloud of war news swept westward: the Emancipation Proclamation, the sinking of the *Alabama*, the battle of Gettysburg, General Grant stirring the dust under his horses' hoofs from the Rapidan to the James. Day after day news trickled eastward from the frontier. In the South destitute Creeks and Seminoles and Cherokees were fleeing from Confederate troops, bringing with them into Kansas the dreaded smallpox plague. In the West Colonel Chivington had shot down some naked, starving Sioux on the dry banks of Sand Creek, while Red Cloud and Man-Afraid-of-his-Horse were plotting their terrible revenge. Far north in Oregon, where the Mullan Road cut across the land of the Flatheads and gold-seekers were pouring in, the Nez Percés had robbed a pack-train on Camas Prairie, not for

food but for whisky. And at Fort Sully an Indian Agent sat at his desk, writing his yearly report to Washington:

The annuities have not arrived. The Indians cannot hunt because of the deep snow. They have eaten all their ponies. Now they run like chickens to gather the offal from the slop-buckets that are carried from the garrison kitchen, while they pass a pile of corn and hundreds of loose cattle without touching a thing, except when they are told they may gather up the grains of corn from the ground where the rats in their depredations have let it fall from the sacks. There is plenty of corn for horses, mules, and cattle, but not a pound can be issued to the craving Indians whose lands we occupy. This has not formerly been the plan of the military. In the past we have issued rations.

Father DeSmet was growing deaf, but not deaf enough to keep such news away. In St. Louis he worked hard and kept his own counsel. So many times his friends had heard him say, "We Jesuits know nothing about politics," that at last they came to believe him, and the annoying questions ceased. Only in his letters to Europe did the priest reveal the anger in his heart. To his brother in Belgium he wrote:

We also have our liberators in America, which belong in fact to the class of ninety-three to which you make allusion. They are known here under the name of republicans and abolitionists. The families of the clique congratulate themselves on all their great accomplishments. They congratulate themselves, in the first place, on having elected Abraham Lincoln as President in 1861. Now in this year the ultra-liberals or abolitionists proclaim for themselves a hundred thousand members. Here then in a word is all that they have accomplished already. It is to their agitation, after thirty years, that one can attribute the war. They have turned upside-down a country rich and powerful, peaceful and happy. They have raised brother against brother, father against son, and children against their parents. They have filled the country with widows and orphans. They have transformed the whole land into a vast cemetery. They have poured out an ocean of blood. They have dissipated a moun-

tain of gold and silver. They have filled the air with the cries of the wounded, the groans of the dying, and the lamentations of all those who bear the grief. They have devastated the plantations of the South. They have destroyed the commerce of the North. They have given a check to the progress of civilization and to democratic institutions which it will take many years to overcome. All these things the liberators have accomplished after thirty years. And among themselves they make of it an overt matter of congratulation. If a monument is needed to perpetuate the memory of their triumphs, our battlefields will furnish them enough human skulls to erect the grandest of pyramids.

Yet after the news of Lincoln's assassination had thundered across the stricken country and the curtains had been drawn, shutting out the light, Father DeSmet's anger died. His friends noticed only that in the darkest hour of the nation the priest grew more placid and more genial.

Father Ferdinand Coosemans had succeeded Father Murphy as Provincial of Missouri. Young, fervent, and excitable, he turned again and again to the missionary for help, only to be baffled by the older man's outward indifference.

"What will we do?" he asked Father DeSmet when the Missouri Test Oath was passed. "No priest can exercise any of his offices, he cannot say Mass or bury the dead unless he has taken the oath. How can one swear that he has never comforted a rebel or given sympathy to one? It is outrageous!"

"There is nothing to do," the missionary said, looking up from the letter he was writing.

"Father Pierre, don't you understand what this means?" Father Coosemans was pacing the floor so rapidly that the hem of his cassock curled up like the black petals of a flower. "It is the end of Catholicism. To comply with the law is to concede the power of the state to regulate religion. To resist is to have the churches closed."

"It does not concern us," Father DeSmet said passively. "The state has no control over the affairs of God."

"The university will be shut down."

"What happens to us, Father Provincial, is not in our power. Let us pray and keep our peace."

His colleague stopped in the center of the room. "Archbishop Kenrick feels as I do. He is going to oppose the law openly."

"He is quite right," the missionary conceded. "His interests are more secular than ours. He must think of his diocese. But we are not parish priests."

"We can still fight for the truth!"

Father DeSmet leaned back in his chair thoughtfully. "There is no way to fight a statement such as the governor made last week. A madman will not listen to reason, and who but a madman would say that the Constitution has never given clergymen the right to preach at all? Now that we are living in a nation of madmen, let us, the Jesuits, at least be sane. That oath will not be enforced."

"It is being enforced right now," Father Coosemans said, "in Pike County, where Father Cumings lies in jail."

"The Lord, who miraculously delivered St. Peter from prison, will also deliver him."

"Father Pierre, you have changed."

"Perhaps. One grows passive with old age. In youth one feels his own strength as the strength of ten. With the wisdom of the years he learns that he is weak and God alone is strong."

Colonel Babcock shouted his denunciations at the state's assembly in vain. "No class of people," he declared, "between Heaven and earth or outside of Heaven or hell, deserve the curse of God more than disloyal ministers." Yet the law remained virtually inoperative until the Supreme Court two years later declared it unconstitutional.

Andrew Johnson, President not by choice but by fate, holding so fast to the reins Lincoln had left him that his hands were cut to the bone, came to St. Louis to plead for his country's mercy and to be heckled and insulted by radicals and hissed out of town. A profligate Southerner, a drunkard, a Catholic they called him, milling around the Presidential train with such pres-



sure that the police had to force a space for the party to alight. Father DeSmet heard and said nothing.

At the end of the war, when old age had come upon the missionary and he knew for certain that a slow disease was hounding him into the grave, it seemed that he had gained the "peace that passeth understanding." Every dream he had cherished was shattered now. The volume of Muratori had gathered dust for years. The tale of the Guaranis of Paraguay had become as visionary as Isaias' prophecy, "They shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles," a dream to be realized not in this world but at the end of millenniums of bloodshed. Over the mountains, where Father DeSmet had once pictured long trains of donkeys plodding from one mission to another, bearing their loads of purple grapes and Oregon apples through fragrant cedar groves, a railroad was being laid. In the valley, where he had hoped to build white houses and church towers with bells to outsing the whirring pines, gold-seekers, whisky-mongers, gamesters, and settlers were putting up their unpainted shanties and wrangling among themselves, as white settlers have always done. Yes, every dream he had cherished lay shattered now. But Father DeSmet no longer needed dreams. As he looked back upon those early years, during which he had struggled so fervently for an agrarian Utopia among the Flatheads, it seemed to him that he had misjudged his mission, that he had sinned by putting his faith in the things of this world, thinking they were the things of God. Surely it had not mattered to the Lord that the Flatheads should have cattle and cultivate vineyards. What had mattered was that some of them should come to realize God's love through the instrument of His servants. "Insofar as I have labored for that," Father DeSmet told himself, "my work has borne fruit. And whatever I planned beyond that was vain, as vain as Napoleon's dream of an empire, as vain as the American hunger for gold."

He had lived a long time, this Jesuit, cherishing hope and suffering despair, until on the threshold of seventy years, as an old man with swollen ankles and aching wrists and a puffiness about the eyes, he had come into a heritage of spiritual peace. Of

late he had endured dizzy hours of vomiting blood and restless, feverish nights, and yet he was hardly aware of them. He and his body had become strangers. The accumulation of flesh and blood and bones which was wearing away so rapidly lived and moved in this world. It carried on pleasant conversations with his friends; it was concerned with the Sioux War and Negro suffrage and the Union Pacific. On the other hand, his spirit had rejected all these. When the body spoke, the spirit was silent; when the body acted, the spirit withdrew. He knew that as long as his strength lasted, the body would serve him, lifting the sword of its courage against the wrongs of his adopted land; and the spirit would watch, approving, unperturbed, and ever confident that God's Kingdom is not of this world and that mankind is not nourished upon bread alone.

It had snowed all day in St. Louis, a soft white snow that piled in deep drifts against the university buildings and weighed down the trees. From his office window Father DeSmet could see the students moving across the campus, their coat collars drawn to their earmuffs. The winter scene afforded a fitting background for the tottering old man who suddenly appeared, leaning heavily on a gold-headed cane. His fine broadcloth coat, his full white beard, and the gloved hand holding the cane were all that Father DeSmet needed to identify him. He had not seen Edward Bates for years. After the Attorney General had resigned from Lincoln's cabinet, because he felt that military authority was encroaching on the constitutional rights of the citizens, he had returned to St. Louis, resuming his law practice so quietly that he was seldom seen on the streets. He too in the latter years of the war had held his peace.

In the missionary's office he removed his coat, unwound his scarf, and toasted his withered hands by the fire. "It's deucedly cold out," he said in a thin, cracked voice. "Too cold for the coachman to wait. I told him to come back in an hour. I don't suppose you have a clock and my watch doesn't run."

"We'll open the hall door," Father DeSmet suggested. "When Father Riley goes by it will be exactly eleven o'clock."

"So that's the way the Indians tell time," the attorney

cackled, sitting down in the armchair, which Father DeSmet had moved to a comfortable distance from the fire, and vigorously blowing his nose. "I see the Jesuits still go on. War, famine, and beggary can't stop them. Well, it's a fine thing, a fine thing."

"It's not as easy as outsiders think, Mr. Bates. These last years have been lean."

"I don't doubt it. I don't doubt it at all."

The priest went to open the door.

"Say, old fellow, why are you limping?" Bates asked him. "I thought I had the only game leg in this town."

"I have a little trouble now and then," the priest answered.

"It's devilishly unpleasant, growing old," Bates said. "Have you got rheumatism?"

"No." Father DeSmet hesitated. "Bright's disease. It doesn't bother me much."

"That's too bad. Then you won't be taking that trip up the Missouri this spring."

Father DeSmet turned, his hand on the doorknob. "What trip?"

"To the Sioux." The attorney was delighted at the priest's surprise.

"How did you know about it?"

"I still have a few friends left in the capitol to tell me what's going on. That's why I came to see you." Bates cupped both hands over his cane and leaned forward. "I said to my wife last night, 'I'm going to see DeSmet, even if he doesn't thank me for poking my nose into his affairs.'"

"I am glad you came," Father DeSmet said. "You know without asking that I am glad to do anything I can for you while I am there."

"Thank you, but I haven't got any business up there. The Lord knows I washed my hands of the whole governmental mess when I resigned three years ago. The only reason I came today is because I don't like to see a good man die."

"God bless you, Mr. Bates. Put your mind at rest about that."

"I'd like to, Father, but I've been told you plan to go over to the Powder River country in the hope of finding Sitting Bull's

camp. I'm not the only person in St. Louis concerned about that rumor."

Father DeSmet's eyes twinkled. "No one has succeeded in finding him yet. I may not have any better luck."

"Nobody's hunted for him. Even army officers don't walk into a massacre."

"Mr. Bates, you exaggerate."

"It would be impossible to exaggerate the dangers of what you are planning."

"I appreciate everyone's concern," Father DeSmet said. "I thank God for friends such as I have, but this is a matter to be considered dispassionately. For the last three years the government has been signing peace treaties with the Sioux. Sitting Bull and the Powder River Indians haven't signed one of them. There may be five hundred or fifty thousand hostile Sioux, nobody knows. But we do know that there will never be peace in the Montana country until those Indians have come into a council."

"There won't be peace anyhow," Bates scoffed. "You should know that. After the Laramie treaty of fifty-one, you came back looking ten years older. Talk about peace! That treaty was supposed to settle everything, and the Sioux were guaranteed Colorado. How long did it last? The minute gold was discovered the treaty was forgotten. I believe in martyrs all right but not for causes that are already lost."

A group of students outside were pommeling each other with snowballs. A pellet thumped against the window and broke, leaving a white splotch on the pane.

"Snowballs, that's what treaties are," Bates said. "The minute the sun comes out they melt. Here you are limping around like a spavined nag and talking about going to see the one savage whose face no man looks on and comes back alive."

"I haven't much longer to live, Mr. Bates. I've always wanted to die and be buried in the Indian country, and this spring wouldn't be a bad time. There is little I can do here."

"That's remarkable!" the attorney exclaimed testily, although his sharp eyes were sympathetic. "A Catholic priest figuring out a guiltless suicide!"



Father DeSmet frowned. "No indeed, you are quite wrong. I have taken every precaution. In fact, I have a plan for getting to Sitting Bull's camp and out of it alive which is almost fool-proof."

"Pass it on to General Harney then and let him try."

"Major Galpin, the agent at Fort Rice, has a Sioux squaw. I'm taking her with me. Sherman, Harney, and the other peace commissioners are going to Fort Laramie first. That will give me plenty of time to locate the hostile camps. There won't be any army at my heels, as there was two years ago when Sully refused to negotiate with the Santees."

Bates laid his cane across his knees and looked sharply at the priest. "Do you really think you can end the Sioux war?" he asked.

"That rests with God. I've given my life to the Indians. They are fighting now not against a foreign civilization or domination, but for the right to live. The Powder River country is the last land left to them. When it is settled, the Indians will be exterminated. I believe, Mr. Bates, that this will be my last battle. If I fail, it is God's will. I will have done my part and can die with a better conscience."

Bates lighted a cigar. He knew before he came that it would be a useless errand. When Father DeSmet had gone up the Missouri in 1863 in the midst of the Sioux War, even the Jesuits at the university had abandoned all hope for him. For months not a message was received. Captain LaBarge had returned from his spring river trip with news that dead bodies were to be seen along the banks below Fort Benton. Furthermore, that year Father DeSmet had left in St. Louis the great crucifix which he always wore on his breast that the Indians might recognize him at a distance. Yet after eight months he had returned, his clothing tattered, his hair unkempt and long. He was broken in health, tortured with headaches, and crippled with rheumatism.

"What good has come from all these trips?" the attorney was wondering to himself, but it was a question he dared not put to the priest. Instead he said, "For God's sake, Father, this time don't forget your crucifix."

Edward Bates was not the only visitor who tried to dissuade Father DeSmet. Other men and women came. They all knew terrible stories about the great Sioux chief who stood indomitable in his defiance of white emigration, whose warriors swooped down upon their enemies and dispersed so rapidly that pursuit was impossible, and whose camp was as difficult to locate as a blue goose's nest.

"Father DeSmet," a young woman said to the missionary, "do you know that if a Sioux is killed by a white man, every member of the tribe is sworn to kill the first white person he meets?"

"Yes, I know that," the priest answered patiently.

"Hundreds of Sioux have been killed in the war, haven't they? That means they are sworn to kill you at sight."

"I don't think they will dispatch with me that quickly," he said. "Indians have a good deal of curiosity, you know. They will at least want to see what I look like."

When Father Coosemans added his pleas to the others, Father DeSmet took him by the shoulder. "I have a great admiration for Sitting Bull," he confided. "I should like to see him before I die and take his hand and give him my blessing. He is incorruptible. He is fighting to the death against what he thinks is wrong. What a great Jesuit he would have made!"

The other priest laughed in spite of himself.

"The people who come to me," the missionary continued, "don't understand that Indian. They think of him as a blood-thirsty, savage cutthroat. They measure his character by the number of white men and women he has slaughtered. They should measure it by the boundless love he has for his own people."

In the spring Father DeSmet wrote to Major Galpin: "Will I be able to obtain an interpreter at Fort Rice; a light, strong conveyance; a driver; and a couple of horses or mules?" To General Sherman: "Last August I had a surplus of \$923.30, which I placed at the disposal of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Might I not humbly ask for the use of that sum toward the defraying of the necessary expenses of my coming excursion?"

And to F. F. Gerard at Fort Berthold: "I will leave, God willing, the first part of April."

Meanwhile, the priests at the university gathered in little groups to discuss the missionary's plans.

"I had a friend who went into the South American jungles," Brother John said. "The settlement was protected by a fence and beyond that fence was a bottomless swamp choked with water-grass and snakes. When animals or natives wandered into it, the ground would give way beneath them and they would vanish. My friend, Brother Stephen, was badly affected by the heat. He had been acting queer for a long time. One day he deliberately walked to the fence, opened the gate, and started toward the swamp. His companions were paralyzed with fear, but the Lord had caused their tongues to be swollen so that not one of them could cry out and call him back. They watched him walk right into the swamp and sink down and disappear. I feel as if we are all watching Father Pierre walk into a swamp like that. He too will vanish and never come back."

"Don't you believe it," another said. "Father Pierre looks out for himself. Do you think he'd be alive now, if it weren't for that?"

Brother John winced. "Even Joe LaBarge thinks it's folly."

"Fur traders and trappers like to make heroes out of themselves. It's not that dangerous."

Another priest laughed merrily. "It's not only fur traders who play the hero."

Although the inference was plain enough, Brother John chose to ignore it. "Father Pierre has changed," he said. "He has what St. Francis of Sales calls 'holy indifference.' Self-immolation it is. Did you ever notice his eyes?"

One of the priests nudged the lay brother confidentially. "I saw a man with eyes like that once before. He wrote adventure stories."

Brother John turned on his heel.

Father DeSmet gave no indication that he was aware of these conversations. He passed much of his time in the shops of St. Louis, buying gifts for the Indians. He discussed with Captain

LaBarge the condition of the river. He called on those half-breed girls at the convent academy who might wish to send messages to their fathers. At nightfall he would return to the university limping, his heavily-lined face pale with fatigue, but his eyes happy.

In a raw March wind that pitted the levee with river sand and covered the sun with a yellow dust, the missionary bade farewell to his friends. "I'll be back toward the end of August," he said joyfully. "*Dominus vobiscum.*" Then he was gone.

That morning a requiem Mass was celebrated in the college chapel for one of the students who had died. Brother John assisted. Try as he would, he could not rid himself of the feeling that the bells were being rung, the music played, and the words spoken for Father DeSmet. "The souls of the just are in the hand of God," he whispered, putting from his mind the anxious petitions for the dead and recalling the vespers of the martyrs' office. ". . . the torment of malice shall not touch them; in the sight of the unwise they seem to die, but they are in peace. Amen."

## 2

The flag had been raised at Fort Rice. In the parade ground soldiers were drilling, wearing the May grass thin with their shoes, stirring up a dust. Now and then the woman who sat on the post veranda could catch a glimpse of them through the gap between barracks and guard-house. The irregular, undignified appearance of the troops was largely due to their uniforms which, being left-overs from the Civil War, were half a dozen different shades of blue.

From behind the log buildings of the fort two women appeared carrying laundry baskets. One of them, a young girl with golden hair, set her load in the grass and stood for a moment, shading her eyes from the morning sun, to look across the table-land toward the Missouri River. Her companion waited impatiently. The woman on the porch laid down the narrow strips of hide which she had been clipping and watched the laundresses without interest, as she might have watched two eagles describe a slow circle across the sky. She saw the light-



haired girl fling her arms out impetuously as if she longed to gather the spring to her heart, then slowly pick up the basket, and trudge once more beside her companion toward the officers' quarters. Silently the shears cut into the hide as Mrs. Galpin resumed her work.

The wife of Charles E. Galpin, trader for Gregory, Brugier and Goev of Sioux City, was known to her own people as the Eagle-Woman, the daughter of a Teton-Sioux chief, Two Lance, who had died in the year of the meteor shower. As she sat on the porch, dressed in her prim gown with its starched white collar, her head bent over her work, only the blue-black hair, parted in the middle and as coarse as a horse's mane, and the leathery hands betrayed her race. But when from time to time she glanced up to greet a passing Indian or chat with one of the half-breeds loafing on the steps, the incongruity between the woman's features and her neatly tailored dress was startling. The Eagle-Woman was short-necked. Her fine, strong face, which was set slightly forward between hunched shoulders, had that fascinating, ageless expression which is the gift of premature wisdom. Her wide, compressed mouth, flat cheeks, and heavy body bespoke endurance rather than quickness; but her spirited eyes, which were dark gray rather than black, and her dilated, deeply whorled nostrils compensated for these other somewhat ponderous physical characteristics. Mrs. Galpin's mind was not slow.

Beyond the trading post, where the tepees of the friendly Sioux were scattered along the river bank, smoke and dust veiled a constant movement of men, women and ponies. Once a horse and rider whirled out of the village and galloped toward the plain. Once the roll of a drum and a man's voice echoed clearly from the camp of the Brûlés.

A door slammed. Major Galpin stood on the porch, his hands on his hips. Although the morning was cool, his shirt soaked with sweat clung to his broad, muscular chest. His unkempt, black beard completely hid a tapering chin, and bushy brows hung over his eyes.

"The troops are having a hell of a time," he laughed. "Rats

and bedbugs so thick in the barracks they can't sleep at night. Anderson's been cussing about having to drill so much. He says they can't stand it with fleas crawling all over inside them."

A half-breed who sat on the stoop whittling a stick grunted. "By the time they fall in at night there ain't half a dozen of them fools sober enough to know a rat from a horse."

"Shame on you, Jeb," the major said. "That's the United States Army you're insulting."

"I'd like to see them rebels," the half-breed replied, "if that damn bunch of Yankees could lick them."

"They aren't all like that, Jeb. They send the trash out West. By the way, the boat will be here in an hour."

"Are you goin' to the landin', Wambdi Autapewin?" Jeb always called Mrs. Galpin by her Sioux name.

"No."

"You aren't losing your courage, are you?" the major asked his wife.

Mrs. Galpin looked up. "Courage? It takes no courage to go to the landing." Her voice was heavy. A casual listener might have described it as dull, but the major was acquainted with that voice. He recognized the almost imperceptible changes in tone and emphasis and measured his wife's moods by them.

"No, I guess not," he said, filling his pipe. "It'll be a sorry day when we have to fear the Sioux between the post-house and landing. I was thinking of our promise to take the priest west."

Quietly the scissors snipped the hide. Mrs. Galpin did not answer.

"Listen, my eagle," the major said, half-tenderly, half-teasing. "Your cousins in the tepees out there think you're taking a pretty big risk."

"Little Dog was well named," Mrs. Galpin replied scornfully.

"Oh, so you knew it was Little Dog." The major was proud of his wife's shrewdness. The smoke from his pipe rested lazily on the cool air in a thin, twisted line that oddly duplicated the thin, twisted line of the Missouri River beyond.

Gradually the Indian villages were being emptied of their inhabitants. Small groups of natives, gaudily painted and be-

decked with ribbons and feathers, were disappearing over the embankment and gathering on the boat landing below. In the fort the soldiers stopped drilling and began their daily target practice.

The major strode leisurely down the path toward the river, the half-breed trotting at his heels like a terrier.

Mrs. Galpin continued to snip the ribbons of hide until the large piece was entirely gone. Then, tying the strips together, she took them into the house.

When Father DeSmet stepped from the steamboat he no longer limped. "I am as light as an antelope," he told himself. "I could walk a thousand miles without weariness." From the moment he left St. Louis he had seemed to grow younger. The problems which had beset him in the city diminished and in time vanished completely. He no longer felt required to make decisions or formulate plans. The dualism which he had first felt only in himself now embraced the external world as well. The spangled cottonwood leaves that reflected the sunlight were passive, the counterpart of his spirit. They rested upon God. On the other hand, the Indians who crowded about him on the shore, until the smell of their bodies nearly suffocated him, were active, the counterpart of his own physical activity. They rested upon this world.

"May the Lord bless you, Thunder-Hawk," he could hear himself say, "and you too, Bear's Rib. Well, Major Galpin, they tell me you are quite secure now, with the friendly tribes on one side of you and the army on the other."

"I'm afraid the tribes have come to see you and not to save me from any scalping," the major said.

Indians and half-breeds were crowding around the missionary so that he could hardly push his way from the landing to the post-house. The confused hubbub of voices and the noise of cargo being unloaded had suspended target practice. The soldiers from the fort rushed down to the steamboat, waving their hats, bumping into the Indians, and disregarding the priest, whom they did not know, in their eagerness to see if the mail had been put ashore. A couple of horses galloped up the hill, neighing joyously

in their new freedom. The lowing of cattle, the yells of the drovers, and the rumble of heavy hoofs scattered the troops to make way for some steers which had been unloaded and were lumbering toward the settlement.

Mrs. Galpin was standing on the porch when the priest appeared. The Sioux woman's eyes were like a falcon's. In one glance she knew that Father DeSmet had changed. The puffiness of his lower lids, the baggy cheeks, the slackness of his cassock filled her with pity. Yet his eyes were as clear as those of a young buck starting out on his first buffalo hunt, and when he smiled at her, she felt a thousand years his senior.

For four days Father DeSmet baptized the children of the friendly Sioux, heard confessions of the Catholic soldiers, and held Mass on the day of Pentecost. From the porch Mrs. Galpin watched him walking through the grass with a youthful grace that scattered the yellow butterflies from the weeds. Sometimes he would sit on the steps with an Indian child in his lap and a group of little boys at his feet.

"There were only five loaves and two fishes," he would say, "but the five thousand people had all they wanted to eat. Now, Little Feather, can you repeat the *Paternoster*? No, not that prayer. That's the *Ave*. The other that I taught you last night, 'Our Father, who art in Heaven . . .'" And the droning insects would add their prayers to the children's as the crescendo of their twilight song filled the air.

One night Major Galpin saddled his two best ponies. "Let us take a ride," he said to the priest.

Their horses trotted over the grassland beyond the last log hut of Fort Rice into an immense ocean of open prairie. The eastern sky was already dark, but a smoldering red band still lingered at the base of two buttes that loomed black and ominous against the western horizon. The flowering blue-eyed grass that tickled the fetlocks of the ponies was hidden in darkness. Not until the last lights of the village had vanished did the major speak.

"You've said nothing about your trip yet, Father."

"I wanted to wait until after Pentecost. Now Iron-Horn has



a sick child. This is the third day of her fever. If she is no better by tomorrow, we had best make our plans anyway."

"Have you talked with any of the Sioux?"

"Not yet."

Their ponies were dallying now. Father DeSmet breathed deeply of the dry night air. "I think that nowhere in the world do the stars shine as brightly as on the western plains. It is like the first Christmas perpetuated."

Major Galpin's saddle creaked softly. "The Sioux chiefs aren't very encouraging," he murmured.

Father DeSmet's hair was a white mist in the night. His eyes reflected the glittering stars. "I would rather cross the prairies in early summer than at any other time. The sage has a sharper fragrance then."

"I talked to Thunder-Hawk yesterday. He says the chances are you'll not get to Sitting Bull's camp alive, but that if you do, you will never get out of it."

Perhaps the missionary misunderstood, for he said, "The Peace Commission will probably be here the end of next month. I'd like to get the hostile tribes to Fort Rice during the first week of July."

"Then you are going anyway?" the trader asked in wonder.

"Anyway?" The priest was perplexed. He drew the reins up sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Even if the chiefs say it means death?"

Father DeSmet laughed softly, and the major could detect no emotion in his voice save an overflowing, robust joy. "Of course I am going. Little Dog and Thunder-Hawk talk about danger, but these Indians forget their lessons quickly. When God goes with a man, danger becomes like the horizon—it recedes. Even a horse at full gallop can't overtake it."

"If the chiefs refuse to go with you . . ."

"I shall go alone. Look, Major, that's the brightest star in the sky, and all this time we have let that butte blot it out. Ten yards to the left was all the distance we needed . . ."

"I can't send my wife into certain death," the trader interrupted.

"Indeed not, Major Galpin. If it is truly so dangerous, neither you nor your wife should go."

It was too dark for the priest to see the trader's face. His voice, however, was irritable. "Father DeSmet, it would be worse than foolhardy. It would be insane, plumb daft, for you to ride to the Powder River country without an escort, guide or interpreter."

"We are fools for Christ's sake," Father DeSmet said, quoting St. Paul in such a debonair manner that the trader was startled. Then he touched his pony lightly with the spur, and the two men rode into the endless prairie night.

"Will you do one thing as a personal favor to a friend?" the major asked.

"I'd do almost anything for you, Major Galpin."

"Call the friendly chiefs together tomorrow and discuss this matter with them."

"That's a very small favor," the priest replied. "Of course I will."

Major Galpin was relieved. He hummed softly. The music blended with the rhythm of hoofs crushing the buffalo grass.

Later, when the major was undressing for bed, he swore at his boots vehemently.

The Eagle-Woman grew suspicious. "Your ride with the priest was not good," she commented.

The trader looked at his wife as she stood before him placidly brushing her long, coarse hair. "Hell, no!" he exclaimed. "That fellow's getting crazy in his old age. Says if the Indians won't go with him, he'll go out and find Sitting Bull alone."

"What Indians won't go with him?" the woman asked in her heavy, disinterested voice.

"Oh, Thunder-Hawk and Little Dog and all the rest."

"I am going," the Eagle-Woman said simply.

"Without an escort?" the major asked, incredulous.

"Without an escort if that is the only way."

"For God's sake, Little Eagle," the major cried. "What's got into you? Has the priest been talking to you?"

"He hasn't said a word."

"And why do you want to run into a scalping party, pretty fool?"

Her hand still on the half-braided hair, Mrs. Galpin looked at her husband with the stolid, changeless expression which always made him realize the racial barrier that lay between them. "They are my people," she said. "I go to help them. The priest—I think he is going to die."

The next morning the friendly Sioux chiefs were called to the post-house. As Major Galpin had anticipated, they shook their heads dubiously.

Little Dog spoke first. "Leave them alone," he advised. "When they are ready for peace, they will come in. The Sioux spares no life when he is on the warpath. Do you think your black robe will save you? You have a white skin, that is enough."

The other chiefs agreed with Little Dog. It was courting death, they said. They would be shot down before they could even speak with Sitting Bull.

"They get guns from the half-breeds up there," one of the Indians said, pointing north.

"He means from the Canadians," Galpin explained, for the Sioux were on friendly terms with the men beyond the border.

Father DeSmet listened to their objections patiently. Not until the last chief had made his speech, declaring that the hostile Sioux outnumbered the friendly bands twenty to one and would slay their own kinsmen if they found them in league with the whites, did he reply. Then he stood up. "For four days I have baptized your children, heard your confessions, and prayed with you. You have assured me that you believe in God and that you love Him. Yet you are afraid to die for Him. I do not ask you to do that. Do you think that five hundred or five thousand Sioux can outnumber God's angels? In the city where I came from thousands of good men and women and little children are praying for us. Their prayers have reached Heaven. They go up higher than the smoke of your tepees, higher than the eagle's flight. I entrust myself with all my fears to the hands of God's angels."

The Indians were taken by surprise. It was not the speech they had expected.

"Are the angels going with you?" one of them asked, wide-eyed.

"How many?" another put in.

"More than any man can count," Father DeSmet said.

"If the angels are going, what have we to fear?" Thunder-Hawk asked.

Even Little Dog sighed with relief at the thought of being accompanied by an invisible army. "When do we start?" he asked.

"Tomorrow morning," Father DeSmet said.

Galpin leaned over and whispered to his wife, "What are you going to do, Little Eagle?"

"I go with the priest."

"Well, let's go on the last fool's errand," the major said, laughing. "One death is as good as another." He clapped Father DeSmet on the back. "If you weren't such a good fellow, Father, I'd be willing to swear that Satan had got hold of your tongue."

### 3

The next morning Mrs. Galpin put on the deerskin dress and beaded moccasins which her mother had made for her wedding day. She plaited her hair into two thick braids and bound them tightly with red cord.

The major was amused. "When they see you dressed like that, they'll think you have tired of your husband and are coming home," he said jestingly.

"I am still one of them," the woman answered.

Major Galpin nodded thoughtfully. His wife's decision to go to Sitting Bull's camp even if it cost her her life was evidence enough that she was "still one of them." He did not grudge her that loyalty. It was a loyalty broad enough to include him, the Catholic priest whose religion she had embraced, and the white men whose civilization she had partially accepted. One year when he was going north to trade with the Blackfeet, he had taken her and their small son along. The boy had died of cholera and



the Eagle-Woman wished to carry his body back to the post. Some distance below Fort Benton they had been attacked by hostile Indians and had had to draw their skiff on shore. They might have fled, but Mrs. Galpin chose to remain in the boat, sitting upon the dead child's body, which she had wrapped in blankets. At the time the major had thought that a strange kind of loyalty; yet they had got through the experience with their lives. He himself was a practical, hard-headed sort of man who had made his way pretty well, guided by horse-sense alone. However, he felt that his wife rested her confidence on something far more abstract, a blind faith which he could respect even if he could not understand it. Certainly he knew that he had never once erred by giving in to her.

The gifts for the hostile tribes were packed into two wagons. Because bad days had come upon the Sioux, there were not enough horses to permit the entire escort of seventy warriors and ten squaws to ride. Some of them had to go on foot. Whenever he could, Father DeSmet surrendered his own pony to one of the women plodding behind the train and walked himself, or found a place in one of the carts. Walking, however, was difficult, for the old pain in his ankles had returned.

During mid-day the heat scorched them. The continual crunch of moccasins and hoofs on sharp, dry cacti became monotonous. The wooden frames of the wagons split open and the men had to tie them together with strips of rawhide. Day after day hot winds stirred up the prairie dust, whirling it into the faces of the travelers so that they could not get rid of the grit in their teeth. Their parched, cracked lips swelled and festered. Nevertheless, Father DeSmet did not lose his sense of boundless peace. The flat, dry land was dotted prettily with red and white and yellow cactus blossoms, and it was pleasant to see the distant buttes appear one by one far off, shrouded in blue haze against the deep blue sky. When the priest had first crossed this desert, those buttes were nameless. Now they had lost their anonymity. He knew them all as friends—Cloudy Butte, Dog-toothed Butte, Blue Stone Butte—friends he might never see again.

Occasionally the Indians talked about the invisible army of

angels. They asked the missionary whether the angels used bows and arrows or guns. Father DeSmet found it difficult to make them understand that the heavenly host required no weapons at all.

"They will touch the hearts of your enemies," he explained, "not with a spear-point but with love, as a father touches the heart of his son and turns him from an evil deed."

"I wish the angels would touch these water-pools," Little Dog said, spitting out in disgust the mouthful he had just taken. The soil was badly impregnated with saltpeter and the standing water tasted foul. Many of the creeks had already dried up.

Major Galpin was disturbed by reliance of both the priest and his followers on the assistance of the angels. He could not help but feel that Father DeSmet had tricked his simple-minded friends, playing on their credulity in a shameful manner. More and more, as they continued their journey, he regretted his own submission to his wife. It was little less than ludicrous, this handful of men and women marching with such complacency to meet a vast army of hostile savages and cherishing the delusion that an invisible host accompanied them. The major was vaguely aware that such things had happened long ago in the Middle Ages, but he could not reconcile himself to the fact that they should happen in modern times. Neither could he be angry with Father DeSmet. He was almost inclined to believe that the priest was bewitched. The unearthly serenity of the man's countenance, his cheerfulness, and his nobility disarmed the trader completely.

"You're going to be in a hell of a fix," he said one night, "if your angels misbehave. Have you ever considered the seriousness of the consequences?"

Father DeSmet had not. He felt that the responsibility for whatever he did lay not with himself, but with his Master. "It's splendid of you to go along, feeling as you do," he said, and the subject was dropped.

One night they camped on the edge of a sandy creek, having found shelter from the wind in a clump of cottonwood trees. The fire at which they had cooked their dinner had long since died down. The Indians were asleep. The Eagle-Woman lay

awake beside the major, listening to the rustle of leaves and the occasional sound of a horse dragging its tether over dry grass. She was thirsty. Quietly, without disturbing her husband's rest, she got up, pushed back the tent-flap to let in the moonlight, and removed the lid of the water-bucket. She reached into the container until her hand touched bottom. It was empty. She would have to go to the creek.

The sighing of wind in the trees concealed the muffled *pad, pad* of the Eagle-Woman's moccasins on the grass. By daylight the drouth-bitten willows and cottonwoods along the stream had looked thin and ragged. But now they loomed over her head like an impenetrable forest, except where moonlight slid through the tangle of brush and glinted upon lacquered leaves. Even the creek was dark and as silent as a stagnant pool. She knelt at the edge of it, cupped her hands, and slipped them beneath the surface of the water. Then she heard a groan, not the cry of an animal, but of a human being. She went cold with fear. She dared not even move her head, but remained like stone, kneeling, with cupped hands half-raised to her mouth. The lonely rustle of cottonwoods rose and fell on the wind. Then a second time the groan shook the night air, and it was followed by a scuffling in the sand, as if a living body were being dragged over the ground.

It was not characteristic of the Eagle-Woman to be afraid. She shook off the terror that paralyzed her, stood up, and after waiting a moment began to creep very quietly downstream in the direction from which the noise had come. Suddenly her heart stood still. A huge black form lay hunched in the sand. She could not make out head or arms or feet. It resembled a faceless monster more than a human being. As she watched it, the thing heaved as if in convulsions. Then a white head became visible in the moonlight, and wet, black splotches fell upon the sand.

Even when she cried out and ran forward, Mrs. Galpin remembered not to lift her voice enough to disturb the sleeping camp. Father DeSmet heard his name only as a whisper above rustling leaves.

"Go back, Eagle-Woman," he said without turning his face toward her.

But a strong arm was already around him. "Ugh! You are vomiting blood!"

The heavy shoulders slumped against hers as if they were grateful for support.

When the spasm had passed the priest lay his head in the woman's lap. He was breathing hard.

"Father," she whispered, "let me call Little Dog. He will carry you back to the tent."

"No, no. I am all right. In a minute I can walk." Yet he lay quite helpless, with his pale face turned toward the moonlight.

The Eagle-Woman bent over him. She could see no traces of pain in his face, only old age and weariness and the same peace that she had noted so many times before.

"This means nothing, nothing at all," Father DeSmet said as they started back to camp. He walked with difficulty. The weight of his body against her shoulder was not easy to bear, but the Eagle-Woman had a man's strength and tonight she was glad of it.

When she crept into her own tent she found the major still asleep. She lay down beside him, made the sign of the cross, and silently began to pray. Although the priest had not forbidden her to speak of the incident, knowing that Indians are by nature not garrulous, the Sioux woman knew in her own heart that not even Major Galpin would hear of what had happened. She and Father DeSmet shared a secret, not a happy secret, but one which had brought them very close together.

Before the sun was up tents were struck, horses were saddled, and the party moved west. There was no outward change in the priest's appearance save that his face was somewhat paler than usual.

"If we don't find any trace of the Sioux today," he said to the major, "I think we had better send out scouts."

The four men chosen for this purpose were each given a



parcel of tobacco, which was the customary way of asking the Indians for an interview.

"What will you do if the tobacco is refused?" the major asked Father DeSmet.

"It's too early to worry about that," the priest answered. He knew well that refusal would mean that all communication with the hostile bands was forbidden.

For another seven days the party continued its journey across the plain. The wind, pungent with the smell of sage, bit at the ponies' heels. The animals had begun to suffer also from lack of grass. Many of them had wither-galls, and they whinnied with pain when the Indians pulled the thorns of prickly pears from their bleeding hocks. Father DeSmet's horse limped so badly that he had not the heart to ride her.

"I can't see that the pony is any worse off than you," the major said, for the priest was very lame.

"Father, there is room to ride in the cart," the Eagle-Woman suggested.

Father DeSmet shook his head. In spite of his swollen ankles, it was easier to walk. The jolting of the cart made him sick and he could not afford to lose any more blood.

Gradually the country became more rugged, until the travelers found themselves among those naked, rounded hillocks which traders called the "bee-hives." The whiteness of the sandstone, intensified by a burning sun, wearied their eyes. The jaded horses plodded slowly now, hanging their heads. Where the flesh had fallen away, the tendons of their muscles protruded unpleasantly. In all this time they had not passed the ashes of one Indian fire nor an encouraging sign of footprints on the starved ground. Game was scarce. The Indians had come to loathe the flavor of sage hen because it had the same sharp taste as the air they breathed all day. Thunder-Hawk wanted to turn back. They would starve to death, he said.

"Why don't the angels send us some game?" Little Dog wondered, and the priest could think of no reply.

In the mountains, lost among precipices and canyon walls which it seemed impossible to scale, they were forced to triple

the number of horses harnessed to the carts. Even Father DeSmet had to put his shoulder to the wheel.

Consequently, no one saw the hostile Sioux warriors until they dropped unexpectedly from a cliff overhead, eighteen of them, led by the four scouts. They were tall, well-built men whose wide mouths and flat faces were terrifying under the gaudy paint. They shook hands with the priest and the calumet was passed around.

Then one of the warriors spoke. "Sitting Bull has accepted your tobacco. The chiefs are eager to see the Blackrobe and to learn why he has come." His cold, unfriendly voice did not inspire confidence. "The Sioux know the Blackrobe. He is their friend. They will receive no other white man, not one. If any tries, he walks into death."

The hostile camp was three days' march away, in the Yellowstone Valley a few miles above the mouth of Powder River.

"I guess I'll have to stay out here in the canyons," Galpin said grimly to the priest when they were alone that night. "I suppose they think I stole my squaw."

"It's unfortunate," Father DeSmet agreed. "But you'll have all the company you want. I think half our party would like to stay behind. Where's your wife?"

Mrs. Galpin was coming toward them. She carried a lantern in one hand and a bucket of water in the other. The water kept slopping out. Father DeSmet noticed that her skirt was soaked. Her habitually immobile face was tense, the lips compressed.

She set the bucket down. "I go for the blankets."

The major caught her arm. "Something is wrong. What has happened?"

"Go into your tent with the priest," she said. "I tell you later."

Inside the tent Father DeSmet and Major Galpin sat down to wait.

"I don't trust these Sioux any more than I trust your angels," the trader commented in a low voice. "How can you have such confidence in them?"

"My confidence is in God," the priest answered.

Now that the way lay open for him to ride into Sitting Bull's camp, the problem of his own safety scarcely occurred to the missionary. Outside the Indians were dancing around the campfire. He could hear the scuffle of their feet, now and then the shrieks of squaws and the howling of men. It was weird enough to witness these Indian dances, but to hear only the sounds of them was unearthly. One might easily imagine that unseen, evil spirits were wailing from the crevices of rock and that the scuffle of their feet came from under the earth's hard crust.

The Eagle-Woman returned, tossed the blankets into the tent, set the lantern on the ground, and closed the door-flap. Then she sat down close to the men, drawing her knees up under her chin. Her voice was very low and the words came slowly. "One of the Sioux who came is Iron Horse. Long ago, before I was born, he was wounded in a battle with the Black-feet and left to die. My father went back for him, washed his wounds, and carried him to camp. He has not forgotten. He has sworn to me that Sitting Bull plans to kill us all as soon as we get to his camp."

"It is madness!" the major cried out. "I said it was madness all along."

"For God's sake, be quiet!" She clapped a hand over her husband's mouth.

Father DeSmet was undisturbed. In the lantern's glow the body of the dying Christ on the crucifix was ghastly white.

Mrs. Galpin touched the priest's knee. "He is right," she said. "We must go back."

Father DeSmet looked at her sadly. "You too," he murmured.

"I am not afraid to die," she said. "But there are eighty of my people here. Will you condemn them to death?"

"It is righteous to fear God, but not man," Father DeSmet said a little wearily.

The major moved to speak but ended by making only a futile gesture with his hands.

They sat in silence for a while, huddled together over their

secret, listening to the weird noise of the Indian dance outside. The Eagle-Woman could see no sign of trouble on the priest's face. He appeared passive, almost happy, and completely detached as he waited for his companions to make their decision.

"Would you go alone?" Mrs. Galpin asked him.

"Of course I would," Father DeSmet said, laughing a bit at the question. "I will not talk to you about God. I will be as practical as the major. You both know we cannot escape now. If we were to turn about, they would swoop down and slaughter every one of us. If I go alone, it will be the same with you. The major thinks we are caught in a trap. In case he is right, you still have a choice to make. You may either go forward and face death, or you may turn around and let death overtake you when your back is turned."

Mrs. Galpin shrugged her shoulders.

The major chewed the stem of his pipe. It annoyed him that he could not be angry with the priest. The responsibility for the whole miserable mess lay on his shoulders. He had tricked the Indians into coming with him, and now he sat serene and unconcerned at the prospect of leading them all into death. In the past the major's ethical standards had been simple and clear-cut. Had he been deluded all these years, he wondered, into thinking he understood the difference between right and wrong. Here was a situation that stumped him. He wanted to jump up and grab the priest by the collar and shout at him, "You Goddamn murderer!" Yet the moment he looked at that pale, firmly lined face surrounded by its tangle of gray hair, the impulse died. No, it wasn't murder. Once again he felt powerless, conscious of forces at work which he could neither see nor comprehend, but which Father DeSmet and the Eagle-Woman understood perfectly.

"Father, what are you thinking about?" Mrs. Galpin asked suddenly.

The priest was taken off-guard. He laughed in embarrassment. "I was wondering if we would get to better grass by tomorrow night. The ponies are so frightfully lean."

The Eagle-Woman stood up. She had made her decision.



"No one shall know what I told you tonight. Where is the rawhide? If we leave early, the cart-wheel had best be mended now."

## 4

The next morning Father DeSmet found the major saddling his horse. "You had better stay here," he said. "I will ask some of the Indians to remain with you."

"Hell, no!" the trader cried. "Do you think I am a dog, that I can put my tail between my legs and slink off now?"

"You heard what they said, Major. They will receive no other white man."

"They can kill me or send me back when I get there," he answered gruffly.

For two more days the party pressed forward, flanked on either side by the messengers from the hostile Sioux. Father DeSmet rode in the van, between the Eagle-Woman and the major. When he spoke to them, they replied in monosyllables as if the muscles of their mouths were stiff. The missionary hummed softly to himself a gay little song he had learned many years ago when he was a seminary student at Mechlin. As the short French words dropped lightly on the air, he thought of rain-drops dripping from green leaves.

"I wish it would rain," he said aloud. "All the creeks in the West can't satisfy a man's thirst when he longs for rain."

His companions did not reply. They stared straight ahead to where the sage that tufted the mountain-valley blurred to a low gray mist.

Father DeSmet dropped behind and rode awhile with Little Dog and Thunder-Hawk. "I'd like to stay in the Sioux camp long enough for the horses' sores to heal," he remarked.

The cart following directly behind them creaked noisily.

The priest's horse suddenly went lame. Thunder-Hawk dismounted and drew out the thorn. The pony gave a sharp cry, baring its teeth.

Father DeSmet realized with a pang of disappointment that the journey had begun to weigh heavily on the minds of his friends. He made an effort to imagine how the situation must

appear to them. It was useless. The tang of the fresh mountain air, the black and white streak of a magpie rising from the brush, and the soft distant haze were so beautiful that his heart overflowed with thankfulness. He had offered himself in this last service to God and man, and his offering had been accepted. "*Fiat Voluntas Tua!*" he prayed. At once the words of St. Alphonsus whirled through his mind, "When we will what God wills, it is our greatest good that we will, for God desires what is for our greatest advantage. Let your constant practice be to offer yourself to God, that He may do with you what He pleases." He wanted to shout that counsel to the Indians who were following him, but glancing at the tight lips, the iron muscles, the formidable faces, he did not dare. Then it occurred to him that already they considered themselves prisoners in the hands of the hostile Sioux.

At that moment shrieks split the hills where they were riding. The horses reared and snorted in fright. The Eagle-Woman screamed.

"The Sioux!" someone cried out.

Wild-eyed, the Eagle-Woman whirled around in her saddle and looked at the priest. He was as pale as death. A drop of blood oozed from his under-lip. But his eyes were fearless.

The major put his hand to his belt.

"Take care," Father DeSmet said quickly. "Let them fire first."

Not a shot sounded as the Sioux thundered down. When the dust had cleared the missionary could see that his entire party was surrounded by prancing horses with ribbons in their manes, by faces painted a hideous black, and by bodies streaked with a red that resembled the gashes of open wounds.

"Get out the banner," he said to the Eagle-Woman.

Together, with trembling hands, they fastened the silk square to its standard, and a moment later the blue flag of the Blessed Virgin waved above their heads.

Now shouting Indians filled the whole valley. Their horses pressed in upon the little party. Proud, high-spirited animals

they were beside the worn-out mounts that had fed on desert grass so long.

The Sioux cut through the line of Father DeSmet's followers, ordering the friendly Indians to fall back.

"What shall I fall back for?" Thunder-Hawk shouted, and he rode up to Mrs. Galpin's side. "Give me a gun."

A monstrous, black-faced Sioux intercepted him, once again commanding him to stand back with the others. Thunder-Hawk snarled his defiance and moved closer to the Eagle-Woman's side.

The crowd proceeded at a slow walk. After they had gone some distance a group of chiefs came riding to meet them. The war-colors across their cheeks contrasted with the black faces of the warriors. They shook hands with the Eagle-Woman, but ignored Father DeSmet and Major Galpin.

"Get off your horse and come with us," one of them said to her. "You'd better not ride here, if they kill the white men."

"I stay with my husband and the priest," Mrs. Galpin answered.

All at once it seemed to Father DeSmet that a rush of wind encircled the four of them—the Eagle-Woman, the major, Thunder-Hawk, and himself—and in the center of that wind lay a hushed, white peace. Outside that wall the black-faced Indians and the friendly Indians were far away, indistinct, a tumult of horses' hoofs and waving feathers. They kept shouting, but the sound of their voices did not penetrate the wall. Then the priest was no longer a part of his own physical body. All his senses had withdrawn from their organs. They had sunk deep into the core of his being and melted into the still, shining peace.

The tent where the Eagle-Woman, the major, and Father DeSmet stayed that night was lined with buffalo robes. The friendly Sioux built a hedge of fire around it, and hour after hour the young men sat up, casting fresh fuel upon the burning coals. The priest fell asleep almost at once. He dreamed that he stood alone in a great circle of fire. He was frightened because he had lost his crucifix. Stooping down and pushing the prairie grass apart with his fingers, he began to hunt for it.

Meanwhile, the fire drew nearer and nearer, hemming him in until there was no longer any place to hunt for the crucifix save in the fire itself. The edge of his cassock burst into flame, and the ground under his feet became red-hot coals. He knelt down, the *Confiteor* upon his lips. Then the flames sputtered and receded as if water had been cast upon them, and the Holy Virgin appeared holding the Child in her arms. As Father DeSmet bowed his head he felt the Child's fingers lightly touch his hair, and at the same time he noticed that he wore the crucifix again.

He wakened with a start. Motes of dust were drifting along the shaft of sunlight that streamed in from the open door-flap. He sat up and looked into the face of an Indian. The Indian stared back at him. His wide, flat face, with bulging eyes set far apart, reminded the priest of a bullfrog. His hair was parted in the middle and dressed without ornaments. He wore no paint, so that his face, bare of eyebrows and beard, looked singularly naked. The thin smile on his lips might have been friendly, it might have been sardonic. Father DeSmet could not tell, but he knew at once that the man was the dreaded Sitting Bull. Other Indians filled the lodge, strange, unsmiling faces; and in the midst of them, close together as if they were captives, crouched the major and his wife. Instantly Father DeSmet was alert. He smiled, crossed himself, and repeated a short prayer aloud.

When he had finished Sitting Bull spoke. "Blackrobe, I hardly sustain myself beneath the weight of white men's blood that I have shed. The whites provoked the war. Their wrongs, their massacres shook all the veins which bind and support me. I rose, tomahawk in hand, and I have done all the hurt to the whites that I could. Today you are amongst us, and in your presence my arms stretch to the ground as if dead. I will listen to your good words, and as bad as I have been to the whites, just so good am I ready to become toward them."

Father DeSmet could feel rather than see that the major and the Eagle-Woman suddenly relaxed as if a cord had snapped between them. "Sitting Bull," the priest answered, "I came here



because I knew your heart was good. The white men say you are bad. I have told them, 'He is good because he loves his own people enough to die for them.' Now I say to you: Love your own people enough to bring them to Fort Rice and sign the treaty and make peace."

Sitting Bull did not move. "No. I have seen my brothers sign the white men's paper. They have given up their lands and they are starving. We stay here where there is game."

"The white men do not want you to give up this land," Father DeSmet said. "They want only a road for the white people to pass over, a road and peace. Will you not give them that?"

"They do not want peace. They send an army. They build military posts."

"Come to Fort Rice and talk with them," Father DeSmet urged. "You cannot fight them forever. They fear you now. Come, make your demands honestly."

A shrewd smile passed over the chief's face. "I will not come, Blackrobe. They fear me, yes. They think I am a devil. If I came to the fort, they would see that I am a man like other men and would no longer be afraid. I am like the Great Spirit. He does not let His face be seen."

The Eagle-Woman leaned forward. "Sitting Bull, you are leading your people and mine to death. Come," she begged. "Come to live at the fort. What good will this hunting-ground do the Sioux when the white men have killed them all?"

"My sister in blood, but not at heart," the chief said, and his lips curled scornfully. "I know your Indians at the fort, how they starve and beg from the whites like old men too weak to hunt. Do you call yourself a Sioux or a white man's slave?"

The Eagle-Woman lifted her head, refusing the insult. "If I were a white man's slave, I would not be here today. When they told us you planned to kill us, it made no difference. We came."

The chief turned to Father DeSmet. "You say they want only a road. I know what the road did along the Platte River. The game fled from it. The buffalo disappeared."

"I have no power beyond urging you to come. I can make no promises," Father DeSmet said. "You can tell these things to the white men at Fort Rice. They will listen."

"I do not trust them, Blackrobe. If Sitting Bull is killed, who will lead the Sioux?"

"Then send someone to act for you," the Eagle-Woman suggested.

"My men die fighting, not sitting at the council. There is blood at the roots of every tree in this valley."

A chief stood up. He was Gall, the great warrior and scourge of the whites. He wore a long skin robe which covered his body to the ground, but he dropped it almost immediately and towered above his companions, naked save for his breech-clout. Wounds covered his body. "We have been driven from one gulch to another," he cried. "We have been hunted and hounded and wounded. Our wounds have not healed. We are not ready to take your people by the hand and call them friends. The Great Father has told us one thing and done another. He told us the land set aside for us would not be invaded by his people. Now the white men have built roads over our best hunting land. They have destroyed our tents and our winter's food and our women and children. When one Indian is bad, the Great White Father punishes us all. You say you do not hurt the good Indians; but with your soldiers, no Indians are good and no white men are bad. Do you see the wounds on my breast? I cannot shake hands with any white man until they are healed. If I were to go to your fort, that is what I would tell them."

"That is what you should tell them," Father DeSmet said.

"That is what I ask you to do."

Gall flung his head back defiantly. "I know what they would say to me. They would ask, 'Where are your lands?' And I would answer, 'Our lands are wherever our dead lie buried.'"

"Let Gall go back with us," Father DeSmet begged. "He will sign no treaty that is not just. Put your confidence in him. Let him fling his words into the faces of my people. I will stand good for his life."

Sitting Bull turned to Gall. "Do you want to go?"

"If I can make that speech, yes. Will they let me talk?"

"I promise you that," Father DeSmet said.

Sitting Bull arose, and the priest saw with surprise that he was squat and bow-legged. "My sister has come and the Black-robe. They are better than the white men. They are Indians before God. Because they ask it, I will send Gall. If he signs any treaty, we shall abide by that. If he does not sign, I trust you to let him and his men come back unharmed. Then we shall cast the bloody bodies of your people along this river bank and call God's vultures to come down!"

## 5

St. Louis sweltered under the hot, dry days of midsummer. As the weeks passed and no word was received from Father DeSmet, the priests at the university discontinued their bantering remarks. The name of the missionary was seldom mentioned. The daily routine continued without change. As often as he could, however, Brother John met the boats when they docked at the levee, watched the passengers disembark, and returned with drawn shoulders and a worried face.

"Brother John, you should have been a Trappist," one of the priests said to him one day. "I believe you have made a vow to keep silence."

The lay brother turned away. Having listened too often to the cheerful assurances of his companions, he could no longer endure to share his trouble with them. He now sought comfort only in prayer.

Toward the end of July, Edward Bates called on Father Coosemans. Carrying a basket of wine, his coachman followed him into the provincial's office.

"Don't pretend to be curious, Father," the old man said, after he had dismissed his servant. "You know very well what I've brought. The way the coachman packed this basket you'd think I was taking it to Europe."

Father Cooseman's eyes danced. "Do you think that we Jesuits are old soaks?"

"Just wait, just wait. What shall I do with the papers?"

Haven't you a wastebasket?" Pulling the wrappings from a magnum of wine, he examined the bottle with admiration. "There, Father, the best Lafite in the country!"

"Lafite!" Father Coosemans whistled.

Bates rubbed his hands with delight. "Look at the label. You can't get any more claret of that vintage."

"That's a fine gift, Mr. Bates." The provincial glanced at the basket to see how many magnums it held. "I don't know what we've done to merit . . ."

"It's to celebrate," the attorney broke in, wagging his head, "to celebrate!"

"I should think so." As Father Coosemans took the bottle, the clear sparkling claret glowed beneath his hand.

"That's a wine worth saying grace over. For bouquet and flavor, for body, color—I know, Father. I had some of it when Lincoln was inaugurated."

"God bless you for your kindness," the provincial said. "I'd hardly expect a gentleman from good old Quaker stock to be such a connoisseur of wines."

"I'm not at all," Bates replied, sitting down. "Seward gave that to me seven years ago. He'd been to Europe and got it right at the Lafite farm. There isn't a drop of Spanish mixture in it."

"You can't beat the Bordeaux country," Father Coosemans said. "Popular as they are, I don't like the island wines nearly so well. Take Madeira, for instance, it's too sweet."

Sitting in the priest's high-backed chair, Edward Bates looked very small. His whole face was a bright pink; even his scalp glowed under the thin white hair. "Last summer I promised myself that if a certain thing happened, I'd bring this wine to you for a celebration."

"If a certain thing happened?" Father Coosemans asked.

"Yes," the old man chuckled. "And it has happened, the miracle no one believed in. Father DeSmet is coming home!"

Father Coosemans was not so surprised as the attorney had expected. "What are you talking about, Mr. Bates? How do you know?"



"LaBarge got in yesterday. He told me all about it, but I wouldn't let him come up here. I said, 'No, I'm going to take them the news myself.'"

The provincial raised his brows slightly. "That's good news. Where's Father Pierre now?"

"He's up at Fort Sully. Said he had to see some Indians there and would be down later on the *Antelope*."

"So he didn't find Sitting Bull . . ."

"That's just it, he did find him!" the attorney exclaimed triumphantly. "Says the old chief's a great fellow. He told LaBarge we needed a man like that in Washington. But I said to LaBarge that what we need in Washington is someone like Pierre Jean DeSmet."

"Well, well, Father Pierre wouldn't like living in the White House, I am sure. How much news did LaBarge have?"

"Plenty. The Peace Commission held a council at Fort Rice the first of this month."

"Did Sitting Bull come in?"

"No, he wouldn't come, but he sent Gall."

"Did Gall sign the treaty?"

"He signed everything. The commissioners think they won a great victory for the government, but I think our old friend pulled the wool over their eyes."

"What do you mean?" Father Coosemans asked. "That's what the government wanted."

"They got one thing they didn't bargain for. They've agreed to destroy all the forts in the Powder River country. I know Father DeSmet all right. He works *with* the government but *for* the Indians. The only man I know who can do that and get away with it."

The provincial laughed. "How many Indians came into the fort?"

"All of them—Minneconjous, Hunkpapas, Yanktons, Brûlés. For the last five years those fools in Washington have been sending out enough troops to clean up the country and have gotten nowhere, and one priest did the job."

"The gospel of peace, you know," Father Coosemans said.

"By the way, Father Pierre wasn't well. How did he stand the trip?"

"LaBarge says he looks thin and tired, but he won't admit that anything's wrong."

The door opened and Brother John came in with some letters.

"Brother John, Father Pierre is coming home on the *Antelope*."

The lay brother went white in the face. His arm dropped and the letters fell to the floor. "Thanks be to God! Thanks be to God!" he murmured over and over as he gathered up the scattered papers.

"Mr. Bates has brought us a gift," the provincial said.

Brother John did not answer. He put the letters on the desk hastily and left. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.

## XI

Et Mortuus Est

1873

### I

Pierre Jean DeSmet thought it odd that his fellow priests should consider his visit to Sitting Bull's camp as the last arrow left for him in life's quiver, that they should now expect him to drift into the pleasant, listless world of contemplation and memory, that brief *jour de fête* granted men who are about to die.

"They are trying to make an old man of me," he complained to Brother John as he packed his valise for another trip to Europe.

"No, no, Father. It is not that at all."

"Yes, Brother, I know. You think this old body is wearing out, and it is. Yet I fancy if the fathers could not replace their landau with a new one, they'd keep on using the old no matter how dilapidated it became."

"It's not that, but it's such a bad time of year. You may run into heavy seas."

"So I may. Do you know if the cobbler has finished putting the soles on my shoes?"

"I'll see," said Brother John.

When he had gone Father DeSmet lay down on the bed. Lately one of his arms had grown numb, and the exertion of packing wearied him. "Have I tended the Lord's fields so long that I have indulgence to neglect them now?" he asked himself, listening with subdued pleasure to the tapping of November sleet against the windowpane. It was true that tasks once easy had become difficult. That was God's way. Should he shift the

burden because his back ached? Must he learn Job's lesson over again that all good is born of suffering? "I must finish packing," he thought, but a pain stabbed him in the chest, and the *tap, tap* of sleet made him drowsy.

It would be good to listen to the bells of Termonde once more, he thought. No other music in the world struck so hard against his heart. Even as a child it had seemed to him that the ringing of those bells put all God's doves to flight. He remembered one spring morning when he had seen the street-cleaner of Termonde feeding a flock of pigeons. One of them was snow-white. With the fanciful imagination of childhood, he had wondered if the street-cleaner was unwittingly befriending the Holy Ghost. Hadn't the nuns at school told him that no man could know when the beggar knocking at his door might be the Lord Jesus Himself? He had lingered to watch the white pigeon until the last bells sounded for Mass. Then as he had knelt to pray in church, the thought had suddenly come to him that the pigeon was only a mortal bird after all, for the Holy Spirit would descend upon God's altar in the mystery of the sacrifice, while the white pigeon would still be dragging its snowy wings in the gutter outside.

America changed; but Termonde was always the same, populous with the same withered fishwives in their black shawls and the same boys at play among the boats. Yet he must come back to America. Yes, next year he would cross the mountains and see the miserable Flatheads, and in the mission church of the Coeur d'Alenes he would beg God to let him die.

Brother John came back and found the priest asleep. Quietly he set the shoes down, drew the blinds, and shut the door.

So Father DeSmet went to Europe once more; but when he returned he did not go to the Bitter Root Valley as he had hoped. A short trip to Omaha, a few days in Chicago, a boat ride to Grand River were followed by sleepless nights of hemorrhages and prayers. The time came when he seldom wandered as far as the St. Louis levee. The damp summer heat of the city made him so dizzy that if he walked any distance, he had to



take a horse-car home again; and the drizzling winter rains brought back the painful swelling in his joints.

"Please pray much for me," he wrote to one of his friends, "for I am fast going down the ladder. My right leg or foot is no longer able, when in bed, to scratch his companion. My right arm is getting benumbed. My teeth can no longer perform their masticating duties. My appetite is gone. My sight is going . . . and when I walk my underlimbs are shaking and staggering . . ."

"Father Pierre is failing," his companions would remark as they watched him limp from his room to the procurator's office.

And an hour later Brother John would put his head in the doorway to say, "Father, you have worked long enough. Go to bed and rest until the dinner gong rings."

Sometimes in early evening, when the clatter of street noises had subsided, Father DeSmet would open his tattered copy of Muratori, and reading dreamily about the Paraguayan missions, his mind would slip back two centuries. Then he would hear the Guaranis singing Latin hymns, as their slow, stately procession passed through the gate by the porter's lodge into indigo fields beyond. He would stand inside the low adobe building where flat-nosed, brown-skinned men bent over their missal sheets, painting the blue robes of the Holy Virgin, laying the gold upon her heavy crown. He would see the brushes drop, the lank hair fall forward at the first sound of the Angelus. Then all the Guaranis would have salient noses and high cheek-bones; their linen shifts would turn into buckskin; and across the fields of Paraguay would gleam the snow-capped mountain peaks of Oregon.

During the long winter of 1873 the streets of St. Louis were soggy with wet mud. Men turned up their coat collars and pulled their hats low against the lashing winds. Women, hurrying from carriages to house doors, struggled to keep umbrellas over their furs. Even the most carefully curried horses drooped mournfully at the curb as if ashamed of their muddy fetlocks and dripping manes. Many old people died of pneumonia that

winter, and on Sundays hacking coughs interrupted the prayers. In March the cherry trees budded and pale shoots of lilies appeared, only to be annihilated by a killing frost. The wan white sun that followed failed to warm the desolate city. Wine-drinkers became intemperate, and housewives sat huddled before their hearthfires, sipping hot tea. In May heavy clouds settled over the town. Even the gray lilacs and rain-beaten grass were without joy. Farmers complained because their seed rotted in the ground. Negroes living in shanties along the river were flooded out.

One morning Father DeSmet, wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown, sat at the writing table in his room, at work on his new history of the Missouri Province. His cramped fingers moved slowly in an effort to make the penmanship legible. His labor would all be in vain if after his death no one could read the manuscript. The barber had not come to cut his hair for nearly a month. It fell over his shoulders and in front of his ears, giving his drooping nose, thin cheeks, and puffy eyelids a melancholy appearance. Once he laid down the pen and spread out his right hand. Curiously he examined the brown splotches on his wrinkled skin, the dry, colorless nails. "That is an old man's hand," he thought, "the hand of one who will soon go home to his Father."

He picked up his pen, then listlessly put it down again. The clear, shining peace that had given him strength to find his way to Sitting Bull's camp had long since abandoned him. Only the heavy burden of his sorrows remained. It was as if the weakening of his body and the increase of physical pain had brought with them a consciousness of sins he had formerly not recognized. Now it seemed to him that he had failed because he had served his fellowmen beyond measure. Surely no cloistered monks had exceeded him in self-flagellation. Theirs were the scourgings, the sackcloth, the motionless prostrations upon stone. But he had tramped through deep snows, barefooted and with bleeding feet; he had lived for months with no shirt to his back; he had eaten wild berries and had thirsted in the deserts of the West until his swollen tongue clove to his mouth. Yes, he had suffered enough, the Lord knew that. Yet the love that

had always torn at his heart was love for his fellowmen, a human love which should have been divine.

When he had confided this trouble to Brother John the latter gently repeated the Scriptures: "For I was hungry and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; naked, and you covered Me; sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me; . . . As long as you did it to one of these little children you did it to Me." Then he had added, "All men are not mystics, Father. I think each of us must serve God according to his gifts. If it were sin, how much more should St. Francis have chided himself for loving the birds too heartily."

The missionary had been comforted at the time, but later the misgivings returned.

"Lord Jesus, I have labored for love of Thee, but Thy creature came between us. Lord Jesus, I would have fed Thee, but Thy creature hungered."

As a young man Father DeSmet had thought of life as a steady growth. He had dreamed that the youth starting out in humility and fear waxes strong in wisdom and confidence. Now he knew that life was the reverse, that a man's wisdom may be measured by his increasing humility and abnegation, that he is strongest when he is weak. Only in old age does one lean completely upon God, letting the Divine Heart beat in his heart, the Holy Will obliterate his will, the Bread and Wine possess his body.

He wondered if, after all, his colleagues at the university were right. Had his dream of re-establishing the Paraguayan missions been free from every desire for personal glory? He tried to think back to the enthusiasm of his youth, but his memory had dimmed. He could not remember. They had been beautiful, those early days. Yet sometimes he felt that he had gone forth like a medieval knight eager to win his spurs, in pride rather than in humility. If so, he had been punished. For years he had disciplined himself to suffer the whispered taunts of the priests who still disbelieved his stories. He had seen settlers move into the Rocky Mountains, the mission buildings rot with

neglect, and the Indians treat him like a stranger. Whenever he thought of that last desolate meeting with the Flatheads, he sickened, and such a bitterness filled his heart that he grew ashamed. In these last years he had met the final disillusionment. The peace treaty with the Sioux had failed. The wars had continued, and Sitting Bull was fulfilling his threat to redden the prairie with white men's blood. It was the old tale of "dust unto dust"—the Jesuits of Paraguay leaving behind them only a heap of stones in the jungle.

But always these unhappy reminiscences ended the same. Always he remembered Jesus Christ hanging from the cross and the mob casting forth its hatred and abuse. "What has all my labor come to?" the priest asked himself, knowing that had the Blessed Saviour cried that question in His agony, not one man in the crowd could have found an answer to comfort Him.

Father DeSmet laid his head on the half-finished page of manuscript and closed his eyes. "Brother Death, whose other name is Life, thou canst not come too early. Now in my last days, Mother of God, pray for me that I be granted soon this darkness which is light, this nothingness which is all, this severance which is union with God."

He was roused by a knock on the door, and as Captain Joseph LaBarge entered the room, the world surged back.

"No, please, don't get up," the captain said, grasping the priest's hand. "Am I interrupting you?"

"No, indeed. There's no one I'd rather see," Father DeSmet replied, glancing around him in confusion, "except that my bed is not made. It gives double service these days."

"At least I'm glad to see you up, Father, and working. I suppose you're the one man in St. Louis who isn't bothered by this damnable weather."

"I see so little of it through the window," the priest answered, still groping feebly at the other world. "Sit down."

LaBarge obeyed. He leaned forward in his chair, twirling his cap between his knees. "I'm afraid I'm breaking into your correspondence."

"No, I am not writing letters." Suddenly Father DeSmet



saw the unfinished page before him. "Oh, yes. I've been at work on a history for the last few months, a history of the Jesuits in Missouri."

The captain began searching his pockets for his pipe. "I never knew a man who could work like you."

"Pray God that I work according to His will."

LaBarge laughed. "As if anyone ever doubted that. In fact, I think you deserve a rest. You've lived three men's lives already."

"Did you ever think, Captain LaBarge, how many different kinds of work the Lord has blessed us with? Surely he cannot intend one's hands to be idle. There's work for the blind and the deaf and the crippled. Yet, since he blessed Mary above Martha, I fear he holds contemplation higher than service."

"I'm a pretty simple fellow, Father, but I don't see how the world could continue if we all hid in the cloisters."

"Maybe it would be better," Father DeSmet said, thinking his problem aloud. "If we all lived by prayer alone perhaps then the poor would be fed, the sick would be healed, and Christ would come upon earth."

The steamboat captain, being perplexed, said nothing.

"At any rate," Father DeSmet added, seeing his friend's discomfort, "when an old missionary whose eyes are too dim for visions comes home and has to lie in bed, he can always write books."

"And what can an old steamboat captain do, Father?"

A familiar twinkle softened the missionary's eyes. "He can bring cheer to a priest who is even older than he."

"That's not work, Father. That's a blessing. But tell me, how are you getting along?"

"My joints creak a little. The hinges are rusty, you know. That's all."

"Are you well enough to be out?"

"I have no need to be. All the world comes through my door."

"I wondered," the captain said, hesitating, "because I came

to invite you—I'd rather you declined, if you aren't well. Have you heard about my new boat?"

"Do you think there's anyone in St. Louis who hasn't heard about it? Three hundred and sixty-three feet long, cut-glass chandeliers, and carpets an inch thick. You'll put the railroads out of business."

"Father, she's the prettiest thing that was ever built in St. Louis, a floating hotel. And you're going up to the Indian country in her one of these days."

"I think the only visits I'll make to the Indians are in my memory."

"There's a special room at one end of the saloon big enough to hold fifty people besides the altar. You won't have to say Mass any more cramped into a two-by-four cabin."

"You're a good friend, Joseph LaBarge."

"Listen, Father, the name of this boat is to be *DeSmet*."

"God bless you! But aren't you afraid you'll lose some of your Protestant passengers? That name may prove to be a jinx."

"I want you to come, if you can, next Friday. Come down to the levee and bless that boat before she sails."

"Of course I'll come. You'll be sailing her, LaBarge, long after I've gone. The infidels will raise their brows and say, 'DeSmet was once a priest; now he's a boat.' But you and I know better."

The look in the missionary's eyes frightened the captain. "Are you sure you're well enough?"

"I'm well enough for anything. I wouldn't miss it."

"I'll send a carriage for you. The weather should clear by Friday."

However, the weather did not clear. On Friday a fog lay over St. Louis, which was so dense that horses passing in the street were ghosts to one another. It crept through the window of the priest's room and sprawled over his writing-table.

Brother John protested vigorously as he helped Father DeSmet dress. "There's a lot of throat infection," he said, "and it comes from going out into fogs like this. You don't look as if you had three hours' sleep last night."

"I feel all right, Brother John. Old people don't need much sleep."

"If someone were dying, I wouldn't say a word. But to go down to that muddy levee on a day like this is nonsense." He tied the cincture around the priest's cassock vigorously.

Father DeSmet put on his crucifix. "You know how indebted I am to LaBarge. He's always given me passes on his boat and a corner somewhere to celebrate Mass. There aren't many Catholics left in St. Louis as faithful as that man is."

"You're not indebted to anyone," Brother John retorted quickly. "Everyone is indebted to you."

"It's funny I never noticed before that this coat was made for two men," Father DeSmet said when he had gotten into his cloak. "The tailor must have lost his spectacles." The garment was indeed much too big for him. It hung around his body in voluminous folds. Even the sleeves were so long that they hid his hands.

"It's the same one you've worn for ten years," Brother John put in. "You forget how fat you used to be."

"Too fat for comfort. It's better to be thin."

Brother John knew that the missionary had not only grown thin during the last weeks, he had also shrunk. Now he looked positively withered. "You'll be fat again, Father, one of these days," he said reassuringly. Then pouring out a glass of wine, he added, "Here, drink this. It will help keep you warm. I'll see you to the carriage."

The priest was surprised to find how feeble his days indoors had left him. His legs seemed too weak to sustain his thin body as he clung to the lay brother's arm. The corridor stretched out endlessly. "It's always that way after an illness," he told himself. "My strength will come back with walking." By the time they had reached the outer door his knees shook at every step, and Brother John had to lift him into the carriage.

When Father DeSmet returned from the levee he went to bed at once. He drank the hot brandy which was brought to him and immediately fell asleep. The next morning he did not get up for his prayers. He lay on his back with his eyes closed,

telling his beads hour after hour. From time to time someone came into the room to adjust the blinds, to bring the food which he never tasted, or to put a fresh log on the fire. Only when Brother John leaned over the bed to feel his hot cheeks did Father DeSmet open his eyes and murmur, "I am a lazy old fool after all."

The doctor who was called shook his head. "There's nothing I can do. Rest will work a better cure than medicine."

## 2

In the college church the red lamp burning above the altar shed a glow upon the tabernacle. The statues of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints were lost in shadow. The votive candles burned down, sputtered, and were silently replaced. All day and all night the priests came and went, soft-footed, their black robes making no noise as they moved. Father DeSmet was dying.

"A man is here today and tomorrow he is vanished; and if he has labored for God, the day of his passing is one of joy. Father, if it be Thy holy will to call him out of this world, strengthen him in his last hour, grant him a peaceful death and everlasting life."

Word spread quietly.

"Now he lives only in prayer."

"A few hours longer perhaps . . ."

The last clatter of carriage wheels died away. Only the distant cry of a screech owl and occasional, hurried footsteps on the walk outside interrupted the long, stationary hours after midnight when time stands motionless, resisting dawn.

A black figure bent over the bed to touch with holy oil the eyelids of the dying man. In a corner of the room kneeling priests repeated the penitential psalms. Father DeSmet lay motionless, holding against his breast the crucifix which had served him so long. His face was quite young again; his lips were slightly parted in a smile.

On the other side of the door Brother John knelt in the corridor. He clutched his rosary in one hand, but the beads did not slip through his fingers. For two hours he had not moved.



He heard the bell in the church tower strike two o'clock and the door of the sick-room open. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder. A voice said, "*Et mortuus est.*"

Three hours later the acolytes, standing tiptoe to reach the candles for Requiem Mass, heard robins singing. The day dawned clear.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE <sup>1</sup>

- 1801 Born at Termonde, Belgium, January 30th.  
(?) Entered the Preparatory Seminary at Mechlin, Belgium. (Date uncertain.)
- 1821 Sailed for America in August and entered the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Whitemarsh, Maryland.  
Distance traveled: 4,520 miles.
- 1823 With eight companions sent to St. Louis, Missouri, to found the first Jesuit establishment in western North America since the suppression of the Society.  
Distance traveled: 1,256 miles.
- 1833 Went to Europe on account of his health.  
Distance traveled: 4,987 miles.
- 1834 Embarked at Antwerp for America, but put ashore at Deal, England, because of illness. Returned to Belgium.  
Distance traveled: 480 miles.
- 1835-1836 Traveled in Belgium, Holland, and France on business for the Society.  
Distance traveled: 738 miles.
- 1837 Returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 5,268 miles.
- 1838 Founded a mission among the Potawatomis near the present site of Council Bluffs, Iowa.  
Distance traveled: 685 miles.
- 1839 Made a trip up the Missouri on a mission of peace from the Potawatomis to the Sioux. Went to St. Louis for provisions.  
Distance traveled: 1,322 miles.

<sup>1</sup> For the information contained in this table I am indebted to Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, S.J.*, New York, Francis P. Harper, 1905. These itineraries are based upon the manuscript letter-books and the Linton Album. The authors state, "The distances in the Indian country are all greatly overstated, although they were the received distances until actual surveys were made." Cf. note, Vol. II, p. 782.

- 1840 Traveled from St. Louis to the Flathead Indians of the Bitter Root Valley, going by way of South Pass to Three Forks. Returned to St. Louis by way of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers.  
Distance traveled: 4,814 miles.
- 1841 Traveled from St. Louis to the Bitter Root Valley and established St. Mary's Mission among the Flatheads. Went to Fort Colville for provisions and returned to St. Mary's.  
Distance traveled: 2,323 miles.
- 1842 Traveled from St. Mary's Mission to Fort Colville and Fort Vancouver, going by way of the Columbia River. Visited the Coeur d'Alene country. Returned to St. Mary's Mission. Went to St. Louis for funds.  
Distance traveled: 4,529 miles.
- 1843 For the purpose of soliciting funds, traveled to New Orleans and Boston. Sailed for Europe. Toured Ireland, England, Belgium, France, Italy, and Holland.  
Distance traveled: 15,479 miles.
- 1844 With companions sailed to America by way of Cape Horn. Visited Chile and Peru. Arrived at Astoria in July. Commenced erection of St. Francis Xavier's on the Willamette. Visited Coeur d'Alene Indians. Commenced St. Ignatius' Mission among the Kalispels. Wintered with the Kalispel or Pend d'Oreille Indians. Made a trip to Fort Colville for provisions.  
Distance traveled: 18,828 miles.
- 1845 Returned to St. Mary's Mission. Set out for the Blackfoot country in Canada. Arrived at Fort Augustus on December 31st.  
Distance traveled: 3,480 miles.
- 1846 Went to Fort Assiniboin by dog sled, thence to Fort Jasper. Descended Columbia River and returned to St. Mary's Mission. Leaving St. Mary's, descended the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Big Horn. On September 7th made peace with the Blackfeet near Fort Benton. Traveled to St. Louis and left that city immediately for New Orleans.  
Distance traveled: 6,510 miles.

- 1847 Sent to Europe on business for the Society.  
Distance traveled: 7,705 miles.
- 1848 Traveled in Europe. Returned to America. Left St. Louis for a tour of the Sioux country. Explored the Bad Lands and returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 9,772 miles.
- 1849 Made an inspection tour of colleges at Louisville, Bardstown, and Cincinnati. Returned to St. Louis and visited the Osage, Miami, Shawano, and other tribes, following the Santa Fe Route. Returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 2,766 miles.
- 1850 Went to Chicago on business and returned. Visited Louisville, Bardstown, Cincinnati, Chillicothe, Mobile, and New Orleans.  
Distance traveled: 4,191 miles.
- 1851 Returned from New Orleans to St. Louis. Set out for the Great Peace Council to be held at Fort Laramie, going by way of Fort Union. Returned to St. Louis by way of Kansas City.  
Distance traveled: 5,457 miles.
- 1852 Remained in St. Louis, except for visits to Bardstown, Louisville, and Cincinnati.  
Distance traveled: 1,478 miles.
- 1853 Sent to Europe on business. Traveled in France, Belgium, and Holland. In returning was shipwrecked on the Three Sisters Reef, rescued, and taken to Boston. Returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 12,000 miles.
- 1854 Spent the year in St. Louis, except for visits to Louisville, Bardstown, Cincinnati, and other cities.  
Distance traveled: 1,400 miles.
- 1855 Made two trips to Louisville, Bardstown, and Cincinnati, and two trips to Chicago, Milwaukee, and other points.  
Distance traveled: 4,468 miles.
- 1856 Visited Louisville, Bardstown, Cincinnati, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, returning to



St. Louis in the spring. Sailed to Europe. Traveled in France, Belgium, and Holland.

Distance traveled: 9,995 miles.

- 1857 Visited England and Ireland. Returned to Belgium. In the spring sailed for New York and arrived in St. Louis.

Distance traveled: 7,200 miles.

- 1858 Went to Leavenworth to recover the body of Father Duerinck, who was drowned in the Missouri. Visited St. Mary's Mission on the Kansas River and returned to St. Louis. Received commission as Chaplain of the United States Army. Left for Leavenworth to join Harney's command destined to Utah. At South Platte news received of peace with Mormons. Returned to St. Louis. Left for New York to go to Oregon with General Harney via Panama. Arrived at Fort Vancouver in October. Visited Coeur d'Alenes and remained with them the rest of the year.

Distance traveled: 10,347 miles.

- 1859 Visited Pend d'Oreilles, Kalispels, Kootenais, and Flatheads. Returned to Vancouver. Traveled to Fort Benton and thence to St. Louis.

Distance traveled: 5,284 miles.

- 1860 Remained in St. Louis most of the year. Visited Chicago. Left in autumn for Europe. Toured France, Belgium, and Holland.

Distance traveled: 6,803 miles.

- 1861 Sailed for America and arrived in St. Louis in the spring.

Distance traveled: 6,780 miles.

- 1862 Left for Washington and returned. Made a trip to Chicago. Went to Fort Benton and returned. Traveled to Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington.

Distance traveled: 9,518 miles.

- 1863 Left St. Louis for Fort Benton. Crossed the Divide and visited Vancouver. Went to New York by way of Panama. Visited Washington and returned to St. Louis.

Distance traveled: 11,782 miles.

- 1864 Set out for Fort Benton on a peace mission to the Sioux. After reaching Fort Berthold returned to St. Louis. Went to Washington to report result of expedition. Returned to St. Louis. Sailed to Europe. Toured England, France, Italy, and Belgium.  
Distance traveled: 14,030 miles.
- 1865 Traveled in Holland, England, Ireland. Sailed from Liverpool and returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 6,416 miles.
- 1866 Went to Fort Benton and returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 6,200 miles.
- 1867 Visited Washington and New York. Went to Yellowstone River and returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 6,880 miles.
- 1868 Went to Cheyenne by rail, thence to Fort Laramie, thence to Omaha. Took steamer for Fort Rice. Set out for Powder River country and returned to Fort Rice for peace council with hostile Sioux. Returned to St. Louis. Sailed for Europe.  
Distance traveled: 10,000 miles.
- 1869 Visited Belgium, Holland, France, and England. Returned to St. Louis. Made trips to Omaha, Chicago, and Milwaukee.  
Distance traveled: 9,799 miles.
- 1870 Set out for Sioux country to establish a mission. Went as far as Grand River and returned. Visited Chicago and Milwaukee.  
Distance traveled: 4,200 miles.
- 1871 Sailed to Europe. No record of travels.  
Distance traveled: 10,150 miles.
- 1872 Returned to St. Louis.  
Distance traveled: 4,800 miles.
- 1873 Died in St. Louis on May 23rd and was buried at the Jesuit Novitiate at Florissant, Missouri.











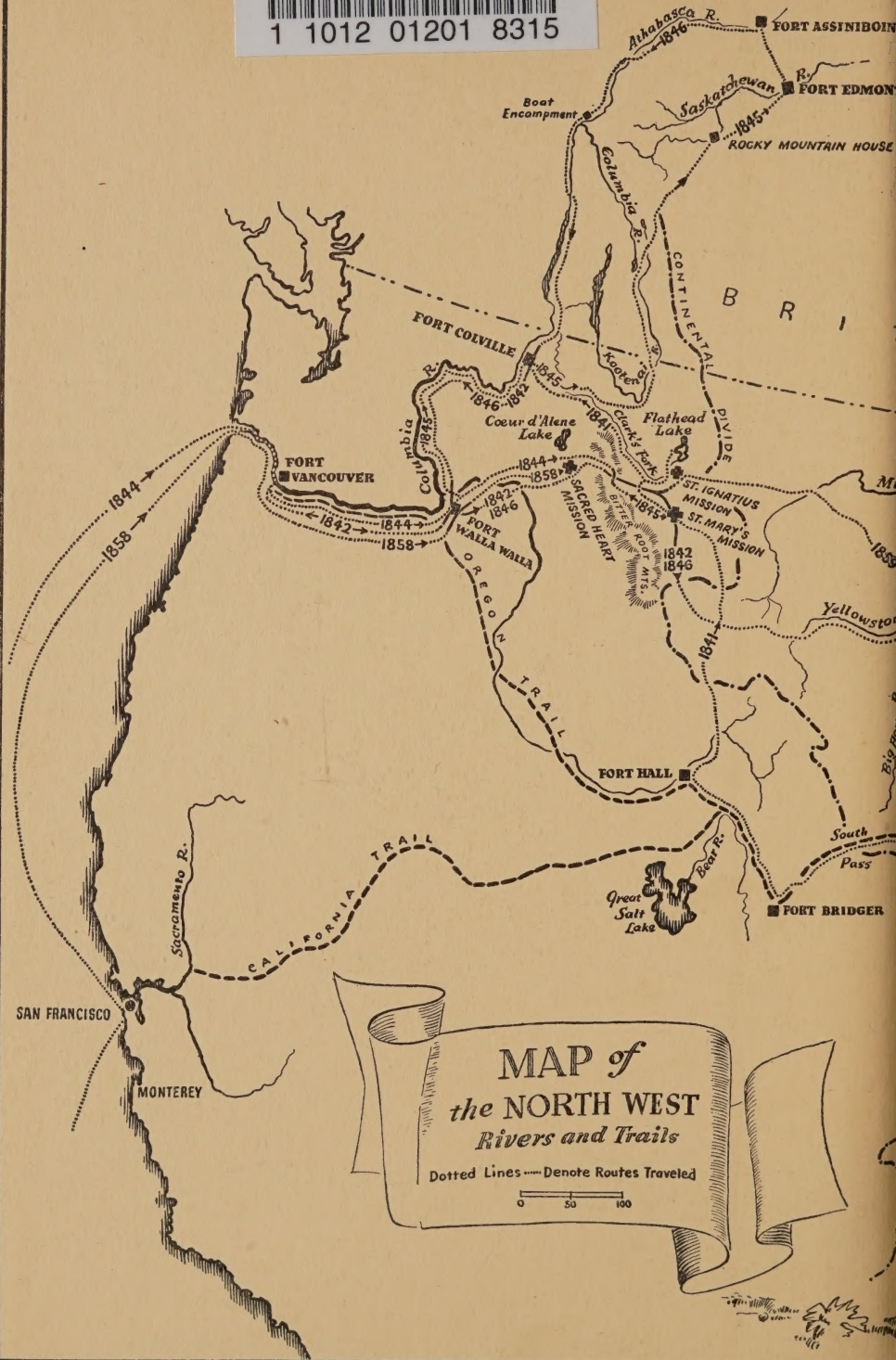








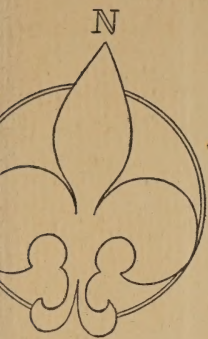
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# MAP of the NORTH WEST Rivers and Trails

Dotted Lines — Denote Routes Traveled

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S H P O S S E S S I O N S

